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THE WORKS OF
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

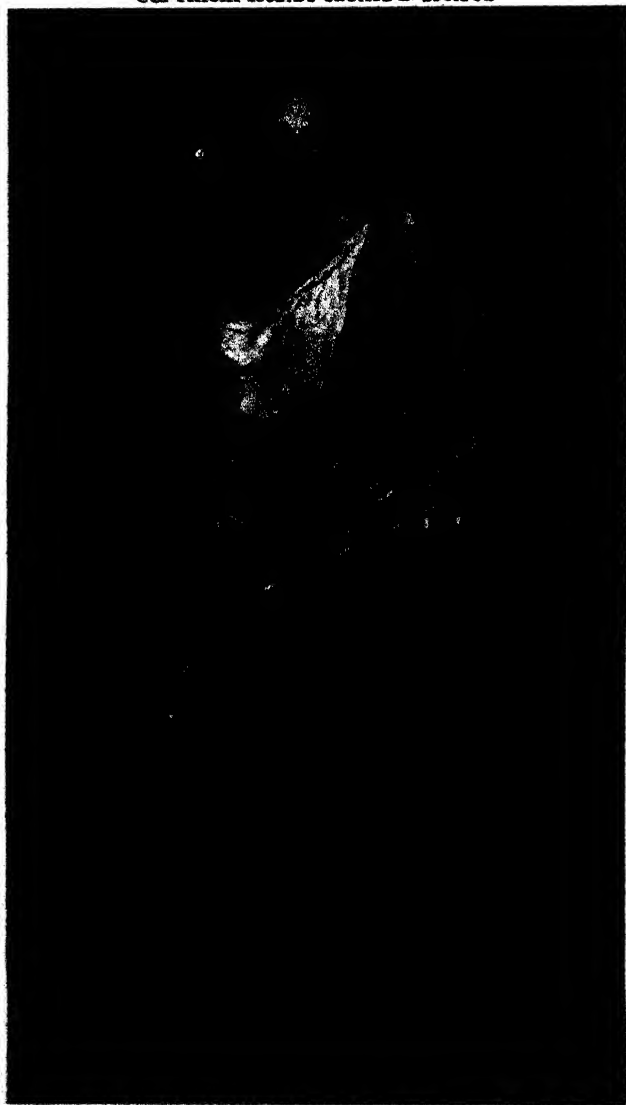
IN TWENTY-FOUR VOLUMES

Carbes Edition

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Carbes Edition

THE WORKS OF
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER
VOLUME TWENTY-ONE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
PROFESSOR F. C. DE SUMICHRAST
Department of French, Harvard University

M I L I T O N A
THE NIGHTINGALES · THE MARCHIONESS'S
LAP-DOG · OMPHALE: A ROCOCO STORY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR



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Contents

INTRODUCTION	Page	3
MILITONA	"	11
THE NIGHTINGALES	"	209
THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG :		
I THE MORNING AFTER THE SUPPER	"	221
II FANFRELUCHE THE LAP-DOG	"	224
III A PASTEL BY LATOUR	"	228
IV POMPADOUR	"	231
V POURPARLERS	"	235
VI ELIANTE'S BEDSIDE	"	237
VII ALCINDOR	"	243
VIII PERPLEXITY	"	247
IX THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE	"	255
OMPHALE ; A ROCOCO STORY	"	269

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List of Illustrations

Militona. *From a painting by S. Glucklich* . . . *Frontispiece*

“And all the wandering population that, within a radius of ten miles, brings to market three green apples or a bunch of pimento.” *From a painting by A. Wagner* *Page 171*

“A roar of horror, the roar of ten thousand voices ascended to heaven.” *From a painting by F. Aranda* “ 206

“But in the mansion lived two fair cousins who ever sang better than all the birds in the park.” *From a painting by Konrad Kiesel* “ 209

Introduction

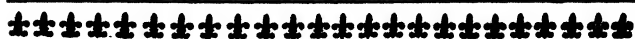
MILITONA

Introduction

THE four tales contained in this volume — “Militona,” “The Nightingales,” “The Marchioness’s Lap-Dog” and “Omphale” — are interesting in themselves, it is true, but especially interesting as exhibiting diverse aspects of Gautier’s talent.

The first of the quartet is a reminiscence of that first visit to Spain, followed in after years by a second, that did so much to awaken, or more properly speaking, to give body and direction to Gautier’s artistic instincts, and revealed to him his power as an incomparable writer of travels and scenes in foreign lands.

What mainly struck him on this first real voyage beyond the confines of France — for his brief trip to Belgium scarcely counts in the development of his talent — was the recollection of the Moorish past of Spain, of which abundant traces are to be met with in



MILITONA

the Spanish Peninsula; the splendour of the sunshine and the colouring, which appealed most forcibly and directly to him as a painter as well as a writer; the survival of costume unquestionably very picturesque, and which pleased him the more that not only was distinctive dress going out in the French provinces, but that the fashion of the day, even in Paris, was regretfully bad in taste; and the strong feeling of local colour which he found everywhere. Now, as local colour was the great fetich of the Romanticists, and as at the time Gautier first visited Spain he was a wild-haired member of the school and a devoted admirer and believer in Victor Hugo and all his works, the country impressed him to an extent that can be appreciated in its fulness only by reading his principal works in their entirety. The remembrances of Spain are ineffaceable in him; they crop up constantly and under the most unexpected circumstances. The mode of speech, the fashion of dress, the characteristic features, the national sport ever recur to him with an added charm. Nowhere did he find himself so completely in his element as in the Peninsula. His poetical work as well as his prose writings amply testify to the fact: one of his most striking poems in "Enamels and Cameos" has Spain



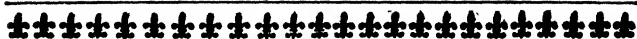
INTRODUCTION

for a subject, and the “Rondalla” in the same volume has passed there from the story of Militona.

He was from the first an ardent admirer of the bull-fight and its attendant horrors: the ripping up of poor worn-out horses, the occasional maiming of picadores, chulos, or toreadors, and the invariable slaughter of the bulls themselves. This was partly temperamental; his Southern blood predisposed him to the enjoyment of spectacles that by most Northerners are looked upon as debasing and barbarous. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should have been minded to weave a love story around the incidents of a toreador’s life, and that he should have produced “Militona.”

The curious thing is that in his crusade against the parchment-faced, smooth-shaven bourgeois, and in his diatribes against civilisation and its deadening effect upon poetry and art in general, he should have made the truest representative of the picturesque and the uncivilised suffer bitter disappointment; though it may be that his love for a dramatic ending in keeping with Romanticist ideas of Spain induced him to sacrifice Juancho as he has done.

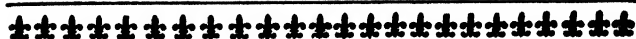
Yet the charm of the story resides in something quite outside the bull-fighting and the rancour of the torero.



MILITONA

It is not either so much in the loveliness of Militona or the affection of Don Andrès for ancient customs and sports, his helplessness in presence of Doña Feliciana, or his nascent love for the young manola. It lies in the vivid pictures that Gautier calls up constantly : the crowd hurrying to the Plaza de Toros ; the slaying of the bull ; the scene of the serenade and the duel ; the interview between Militona and the torero, in presence of the wounded Andrès, but above all, the description of the home of the lovers in the Granada Gautier loved so well.

This latter passage has an interest of its own, for originally it formed, in an altered version, the opening of the tale, the scene of which was laid, not in Madrid, but in Granada itself. Only, instead of the house being described as beauteous in every respect, it was made to appear in bad taste ; this in order to carry out the notion of ridicule that the author wished to attach to Felician first, and later to Sir Edward. But his heart failed him, apparently, and he revolted at the thought of making the piano strum in the neighbourhood of the Alhambra and the Generalif, and he wisely shifted his ground and kept the Moorish city for the setting of the attempt on Militona's life.

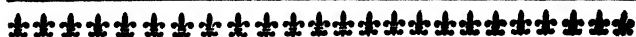


INTRODUCTION

Very different is the short, sweet tale called "The Nightingales." Written for young people, and appearing first in a publication intended for them, it was composed in order to explain an engraving, —a common practice in those days, as Gautier has told us himself. But no one remembers the engraving, and everybody who has ever read "The Nightingales" keeps the quaint story in mind. It is a very delicate bit of work, written in a subdued tone, but none the less very telling. Gautier loved music, and in this brief sketch he has praised it as it deserves.

"The Marchioness's Lap-Dog" is in another strain. This time it is the eighteenth century which has attracted the author, and he has made a dainty little story out of a mere trifle, with just enough indication of the licentiousness of the age to be in keeping with the model he followed, yet not enough of it to spoil what is really a deftly touched story of a man's whim and a woman's caprice.

"Omphale" is purely fantastic; it does not pretend to be anything else. It belongs to the same class of story as "The Mummy's Foot," "Arria Marcella," and "The Vampire." It is not as long as any of these; it is not as important in the author's work, but it has



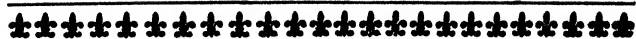
MILITONA

a witching grace of its own. Probably it was written partly to afford still another opportunity of describing tapestry and furniture and plate — in which Gautier always took much delight — but it is fanciful enough to excite and retain the reader's interest to the end.

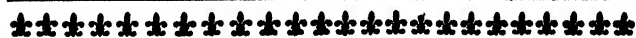
“ Militona ” was published in instalments in *la Presse*, from January 1 to 16, 1847. It was republished in book form the same year, and in 1852 took its place among the “ *Un Trio de Romans* ” along with another story that will be contained in the next volume of this series. Juancho's serenade was also transferred to “ Enamels and Cameos ” in 1853, under the title “ Rondalla.”

“ The Nightingales ” appeared in *l'Amulette, étrenne à nos jeunes amis*, in 1833, and “ Omphale,” which at first had a sub-title, “ The Tapestry in Love,” saw the light in the *Journal des gens du monde*, in 1834.

Militona



MILITONA



I

ON a Monday in the month of June, 184—, *dia de toros*, as they say in Spain, a good-looking young fellow apparently very much out of humour, was proceeding towards a house in the Calle San Bernardo, situated within the most noble and most heroic city of Madrid.

The annoyance visible on the features of the young man was increased by the sound of the strumming of a piano audible through the open windows of the house. He stopped in front of the door, as if he hesitated about entering, but made up his mind quickly, overcame his repugnance, and let fall the knocker, the loud sound of which was repeated in the staircase by the noise of the heavy and awkwardly eager steps of the gallego who was hastening down to open.

It might have been supposed that some unpleasant business, a loan to be negotiated at usurious rates, a



MILITONA

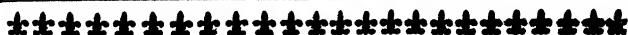
debt to be paid, or a sermon to be listened to from an old and scolding relative was the cause of the cloud that lowered over the naturally bright face of Don Andrès de Salcedo. But it was nothing of the sort, for not being in debt, Don Andrès de Salcedo had no need to borrow money, and all his relatives being dead, he looked for no inheritance and thus feared not the remonstrances of any sour old aunt or grumpy uncle.

While it does not do credit to his gallantry, it must be owned that Don Andrès was simply on his way to visit his betrothed, Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios, as was his daily custom.

Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios was a young lady of good family, rather pretty and fairly rich, whom Don Andrès was engaged to marry ere long.

Assuredly this fact was not calculated to darken the brow of a young fellow of twenty-four, and the prospect of spending an hour or two with a *novia* who was barely "sweet sixteen" could not be very terrifying to contemplate.

As a bad temper does not prevent coquetry from asserting its rights, Andrès, who had thrown away his cigar at the foot of the steps, shook off, as he ascended the stairs, the white ashes that soiled the facings of his



MILITONA

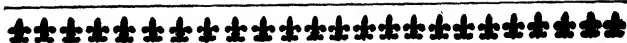
coat, pushed back his hair, and gave an extra twist to his mustaches. At the same time he put off his look of annoyance, and the prettiest set smile flitted over his lips.

"I do hope," he said to himself as he entered the apartment, "that she will not take it into her head to make me practise with her that atrocious endless duet by Bellini, which has to be begun again a score of times! If she does I am sure to miss the first part of the fight and the face the alguazil will make when the gate is opened to let the bull rush in."

This was the fear that filled Don Andrès' soul, and it must be confessed that it was well-founded.

Feliciano, seated on a stool, and bending slightly forward, was studying the formidable score, opened at the dreaded place; her elbows turned well out on either side her waist, and her fingers outspread, she was engaged in striking loud chords, and going over a difficult passage with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.

She was so engrossed in her task that she did not notice the entrance of Don Andrès, whom the maid had allowed to go in unannounced, as one who was at home and soon to be her mistress' husband.

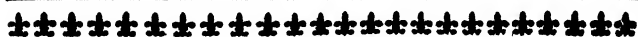


MILITONA

Andrès, the sound of his footsteps deadened by the Manila straw matting that covered the bricked floor, reached the centre of the room without attracting the young girl's attention.

While Doña Feliciana is struggling with her piano, and Don Andrès remains standing behind her, uncertain whether he ought frankly to break in upon the row she is making or cough discreetly to make her aware of his presence, it may be as well to take a look at the place in which this is going on.

The walls were painted in flat distemper colouring, the windows and doors being adorned with imitation mouldings and framework in grisaille. A few mezzotint engravings, brought from Paris, — “Regret and Remembrance,” “The Little Poachers,” “Don Juan and Haidee,” “Minna and Brenda,” — were hung in most symmetrical fashion by green silk cords. Black horse-hair sofas, and chairs to match, the backs representing lyres, a mahogany bureau and table, adorned with sphinxes for handles, a remembrance of the conquest of Egypt, and a clock representing Esmeralda making her goat write Phœbus's name, flanked by two candelabra under glass shades, completed the tasteful furnishing of the room.

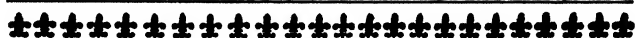


MILITONA

Swiss muslin curtains with large patterns and draped in pretentious fashion, with much stamped work on them, hung at the windows and reproduced in the most distressingly accurate manner the designs scattered the world over by Paris upholsterers in fashion papers and lithographed circulars. But I am bound to add that these curtains excited general admiration and envy.

It would be unjust to pass in silence over a whole pack of little dogs in spun glass, numbers of groups in modern china, filigree baskets filled with enamelled flowers, paper-weights in alabaster, and Spa-wood boxes enriched with coloured ornaments, all of which brilliant superfluities, intended to reveal Felician's intense love of art, were crowded upon whatnots. For Felician Vasquez had been brought up in the French fashion and trained to hold the mode of the day in the deepest respect. Consequently, at her request, all the old furniture had been relegated to the attic, to the great regret of Don Geronimo Vasquez, her father, who, though weak-willed, was a man of sense.

The ten-branched chandeliers, the four-burner lamps, the Russia leather arm-chairs, the damask hangings, the Persian carpets, the Chinese screens, the grand-



MILITONA

father's-clocks, the red velvet furniture, the marquetry cabinets, the darkened paintings by Orrente and Menendez, the huge bedsteads, the massive walnut tables, the dressers with quadruple doors, the wardrobes with sets of twelve drawers, and the huge flower-vases, all the old Spanish luxury, in a word, had had to make room for the third-rate modern elegance which delights simple-minded people that have fallen in love with civilising ideas, and which would be rejected by an English chambermaid.

Dofia Feliciana was dressed in the fashion of two years before, and it goes without saying that her attire was in no respect Spanish, for she possessed in the highest degree that supreme detestation of whatever is picturesque and characteristic which marks a woman of fashion. Her gown, of a neutral shade, had a pattern of almost invisible sprigs of flowers; the stuff had been brought from England and smuggled through by the bold Gibraltar smugglers. The most pimple-faced and sour bourgeoisie would have selected precisely such a dress for her own daughter. A cape trimmed with Valenciennes lace modestly concealed the timid charms which the opening of the bodice, rendered obligatory by fashion, might have left uncovered. A narrow shoe



MILITONA

set off a foot that did not belie its origin by its small size and its arched instep.

This was, indeed, the only mark of her nationality which Doña Feliciana had preserved; otherwise she might well have passed for a German girl or a French one from the Northern provinces. Her blue eyes, her fair hair, and her uniformly rosy complexion were utterly unlike the idea of a Spanish maid as conveyed in ballads and keepsakes. She never wore the mantilla, and had no stiletto stuck in her garter. She did not know the fandango and the cañucha, but she was an adept at quadrilles, rigadoons, and the two-step waltz. She never went to a bull-fight, for she considered it a "barbarous" pastime; on the other hand, she never failed to be present at the first performance of vaudevilles adapted from Scribe's, at the Teatro del Principe, or to attend the performances of the Italian singers at the Teatro del Circo. In the evening she was in the habit of driving on the Prado, wearing a bonnet that had come straight from Paris. Thus it is plain that Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios was in every respect a thoroughly well brought-up young lady.

This was just what Don Andrès kept saying to himself; only, he did not dare to express, even to himself,



MILITONA

the corollary of that opinion, — Perfectly well brought-up, but utterly dull.

It may be asked why Don Andrès was courting, with a view to marriage, a girl for whom he cared so little. Was it through love of lucre? Not at all, for Doña Feliciana's dowry, though it amounted to a pretty round sum, was not large enough to influence in the least Don Andrès de Salcedo, who was fully as rich as she. The match had been arranged by the parents of the young couple, who had raised no objections. Fortune, birth, age, close intimacy, friendship from childhood, were all combined; Andrès had got accustomed to looking upon Feliciana as his wife, and when he went to her house it seemed to him that he was going home. Now, when a man goes home there is nothing for him to do but to go out. In other respects Andrès considered Feliciana was endowed with all desirable qualities: she was pretty, slender, and fair; she spoke French and English and could make tea, though it is true that Don Andrès could not bear the abominable decoction. She could dance and, alas! play the piano, and she was rather good at water-colours. Unquestionably a man who wanted more must have been very hard to please.

MILITONA

“ Oh! it is you, is it, Andrès? ” said Feliciana, without turning round. She had recognised that it was her betrothed by the creaking of his shoes.

The fact that so well brought-up a young lady as Doña Feliciana called the young gentleman by his Christian name need excite no surprise, it being the custom to do so in Spain after people have become somewhat intimate; and the use of the first name does not, as with us, indicate any relations of a lover-like nature.

“ You have come just in time; I was busy practising the duet we are to sing to-night at the Marchioness de Benavidès’ tertullia.”

“ I am afraid I am rather hoarse,” answered Andrès, endeavouring at the same time to cough in support of his statement; but the cough did not sound genuine, and Doña Feliciana, unmoved by his excuse, said rather cruelly : —

“ It will not amount to much, and we ought to sing the duet through once more together to make sure that it will go well. Please take my seat at the piano and play the accompaniment.”

The poor fellow cast a sorrowful glance at the clock; it was four o’clock. He could not keep back a sigh,



MILITONA

and let fall his hands despairingly upon the ivory keyboard.

When the duet had been sung without too many mistakes, Andrès again looked at the clock, on which Esmeralda was still busy teaching her goat, but his furtive glance was noticed by Feliciana.

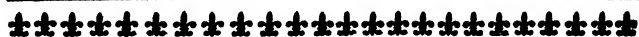
"You appear to take a great interest in the time to-day," said she. "I observe that you cannot take your eyes off the clock."

"I am merely looking round in a vague sort of a way, for what care I about the time when I am with you?" returned he as he gallantly bent over Feliciana's hand and kissed it respectfully.

"I quite believe that on any other day of the week you are indifferent to the progress of the hours, but on a Monday it is quite another matter."

"Why should I be, light of my life? Does not time fly just as swiftly, especially when I am fortunate enough to be singing with you?"

"Monday is bull-fight day, and you may deny it or not, as you please, my dear Andrès, but just at this moment you would a great deal rather be at the Alcala Gate than in front of my piano. It seems to me that your love of that dreadful sport is quite incorrigible."



MILITONA

Once we are married, however, I shall take care that you become more civilised and more humane."

"I did not actually intend to go to the fight, yet, if you do not mind, I own that — I went yesterday to the Abrunigal Arroyo, and there were, among others, four Gaviria bulls, superb animals, with huge dewlaps, clean-limbed, and muscular, and with horns like crescents. They were so fierce and wild that they had wounded one of the tame bulls. What a splendid fight there will be presently in the ring, if only the toreros are brave and skilful!" cried Andrès, impetuously, carried away by his enthusiasm as an *aficionado*.

During the delivery of this tirade Feliciano had assumed a supremely disdainful air, and said to Don Andrès: —

"You will never be anything more than a barbarian varnished over; you will drive me crazy with your descriptions of wild beasts and your accounts of animals ripped up. And you talk about horrid things like those with an air of delight, as if there were nothing finer in the world."

Poor Andrès hung his head, for, like other Spaniards, he had read the stupid philanthropical tirades which cowards and nerveless souls have written against bull-



MILITONA

fighths, that are one of the noblest sports it is given to man to behold, so that he fancied he must be something like a Roman of the Decadence, part butcher, part belluarium, part cannibal. All the same he would willingly have given every douro in his purse to the man who would have shown him how to get away decently and to reach the ring in time for the beginning of the fight.

“Well, my dear Andrès,” said Feliciana with a half-ironical smile, “I do not pretend to be capable of rivalling those terrible Gaviria bulls, and I do not mean to deprive you of a pleasure you enjoy so much. Your body is here, but your heart is in the amphitheatre. Be off with you ; I am merciful and set you at liberty, on condition that you shall come early to the Marchioness de Benavidès’.”

Impelled by delicacy of feeling Andrès would not profit at once by the leave given him by Feliciana ; he chatted for some time longer and went out lingeringly, as if delayed in spite of himself by the charm of the conversation. He walked slowly until he had turned the corner of the Calle Ancha de San Bernardo and into the Calle de la Luna. Then, sure he could not be seen from his betrothed’s balcony, he started at a



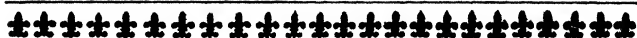
MILITONA

pace that speedily brought him into the Calle de Desengaño.

A stranger would have noticed with surprise that everybody was going in the same direction ; every one was going, no one was coming. This is a phenomenon that recurs every Monday, between four and five o'clock.

In a few moments Andrès had got up to the fountain that marks the intersection of the streets de San Luiz, Fuencarral, and Ortaleza. He was nearing his destination.

As soon as he had crossed the Calle del Caballero de Gracia, he entered into the splendid Calle d'Alcala, that grows broader as it draws nearer the city gates, just like a stream which as it approaches the sea grows with the affluents that fall into it. In spite of its vast width, this handsome street, that Paris and London might well envy, and the slope of which, bordered with daz-
zingly white buildings, ends in a burst of sky, was crowded to the walls with a compact, multi-coloured, swarming, and ever denser crowd. Pedestrians, horse-
men, carriages crossed, bumped, became tangled up amid a cloud of dust, joyous cries, and shouts. Sticks fell upon the backs of restive animals ; bells, hung in



MILITONA

clusters upon the headstalls of mules, clanged deafeningly, while the two sacramental Spanish words were bandied to and fro from one group to another like shuttlecocks struck by battledores.

In the midst of this human sea appeared here and there, like cachalots, coaches of the days of Philip IV, their gilding faded, their colours washed out, dragged by four antediluvian steeds, or single-seated berlins, that had been very stylish in the days of Manuel Godó, but now sank down upon their worn springs, and looked more disreputable than the old passenger vans of Paris, whose occupation was destroyed by the railways. On the other hand, as if to represent modern times, omnibuses drawn by six or eight mules, kept going at full speed by a fusilade of cracking whips, burst through the crowd, the people shoving back in fear against the polled and squat trees that border the Calle d'Alcala from the Fountain of Cybele to the triumphal gate erected in honour of Charles III.

Never did a post-chaise, even when the postilion received five-franc tips, — in the days when there was still posting, — fly at such a pace. This phenomenal speed is explained by the fact that Madrid omnibuses run two hours a week only: namely, during the hour



MILITONA

just, before the bull-fight, and the hour immediately after. As a number of trips have to be made in a short time, the drivers are compelled to get all the pace they can out of their mules by means of whip-lashes, and it must be owned that the drivers' inclination is quite in accord with the necessity under which they labour.

Andrès walked on with the light, springing gait characteristic of the Spaniards, who are the best walkers in the world, and he jingled joyously in his pocket, among a few douros and small coins, his *sombra* ticket, entitling him to a seat on the shady side, close to the barrier; for, disdaining the more stylish boxes, he preferred to lean on the ropes which are supposed to prevent the bull from leaping in upon the spectators, — even though he thus risked rubbing elbows with a peasant in parti-coloured jacket or having a manolo blow his cigarette smoke into his hair, — because, in that particular place one can see every detail of the fight and appreciate at their real worth the strokes delivered.

Although he was engaged to be married, Don Andrès did not deny himself the pleasure of looking at the pretty faces more or less concealed by lace, velvet, or taffeta mantillas, and if a beauty went by, her fan



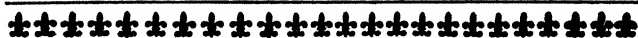
MILITON A

on her cheek, opened out by way of sunshade to keep the rough kisses of sunburn from the blooming pallor of her delicate complexion, Andrès would quicken his steps and, turning round without affectation, gazed his fill upon the features that had been hidden from him.

On this day Don Andrès was more careful than usual in his examination of the fair, allowing no possibly pretty face to pass him without studying it inquisitively; he seemed to be looking for some one in the crowd.

From a strict moral point of view a man who is engaged to be married ought not to be aware that there are any other women in the world than his novia; but outside of novels such scrupulous fidelity is rare indeed. So Don Andrès, though he was not descended from Don Juan Tenorio or Don Juan de Marañá, was drawn to the Plaza de Toros by something else than the mere attraction of the fine sword-thrusts of Luca Blanco and Montès' nephew.

On the preceding Monday he had caught sight, at the bull-fight, on the *tendido* benches, of a wondrously beautiful and strangely expressive young girl's face, the features of which had become imprinted on his memory



MILITONA

with astonishing clearness, considering how brief a glimpse he had had of them. It was a mere fortuitous chance, that ought not to have left behind it any more durable impression than that made by a picture glanced at in passing, since no word, no look had been exchanged by Andrès and the young manola, for the girl appeared to belong to that class, and they had been separated by quite a space. Besides, Andrès had no reason to think that the girl herself had noticed him and remarked his admiration of her; her eyes, fixed on the ring, had not moved once from the spectacle, in which she seemed to be wholly absorbed. It was therefore a mere incident, which he ought to have forgotten on the very spot where it had occurred; yet time and again the face of the young girl had recurred to Andrès' memory with undue vivacity and persistency.

In the evening, unconsciously, no doubt, he had continued his walk, usually confined to the Salón del Prado, where the fashionable world of Madrid lolls on chairs, beyond the Alcachofa Fountain, under the shady walks frequented by the manolas of the Plaza Lavapiès. He was led to break with his fashionable habits by a faint hope of meeting the unknown once more.



MILITONA

A further significant symptom was that he had noticed that Felician's hair, when seen in reflected light, had curious shades scarcely attenuated by the use of cosmetics — a thing he had never observed before — and that her eyes, bordered with pale lashes, were wholly devoid of expression, save that of the modest ennui of a well brought-up girl; and as he reflected on the coming sweets of marriage, he involuntarily yawned.

Just as Andr s was passing under one of the three arches of the Alcala Gate, a calesino was forcing its way through the crowd amid a concert of curses and hisses, that being the manner in which the Spaniards treat whatever disturbs them in the enjoyment of their pleasures and seems to infringe upon the supremacy of pedestrians. The calesino was a delightfully extravagant vehicle; the body, perched on two huge scarlet wheels, was covered with a wealth of Cupids and Anacreontic attributes, such as lyres, tambourines, pipes, hearts pierced with darts, kissing doves, all the work of a long since dead painter endowed with more audacity than skill.

The mule, clipped half-way down, jingled upon its ornamented head-gear a regular set of chiming, tinkling



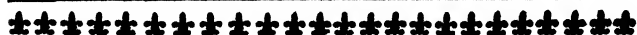
MILITONA

bells. The saddler who had made the harness had indulged in a downright debauch of braiding and stitching, of pompons, tufts, and trifles of all colours. At a distance, but for the long ears that emerged from the gaudy mass, the mule's head, thus attired, might have been mistaken for a walking nosegay.

A fierce-looking calesero, in shirt-sleeves and an Astrakhan fur jacket on his shoulder, seated sideways on the shaft, was raining blows with the butt of his whip upon the bony quarters of the animal, that bent to its work and rushed on with renewed fury.

Now, there is nothing about a calesino at the Alcala Gate on a Monday that calls for a detailed description or that deserves to attract attention, and if this particular one has been thus honoured by a special account, it is because the moment Don Andrès caught sight of it, his face expressed the most delighted surprise.

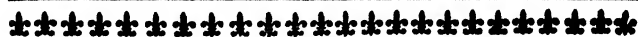
It is not usual for a carriage to drive empty to the Plaza de Toros, and in this calesino were seated two persons. The first was a little old woman, stout, dressed in black, in old-time fashion. Her gown, an inch too short, allowed to be seen the lower hem of a yellow petticoat, such as is worn by Castilian peasants. The venerable creature was one of those women who,



MILITONA

in Spain, are called *tia Pelona* or *tia Blasía*, as their name may be, just as, in the world so well described by Paul de Kock, we say Mother Michael or Mother Godichon. Her big, flat-featured, wan face would have been uncommonly vulgar had not its commonplaceness been relieved by a certain fierce, grim look worthy of the duennas of the good old days, due to a pair of black eyes, broadly ringed with dark circles, and two slight mustaches that shadowed the corners of the lips. Goya, the inimitable author of the "Caprices," would have drawn the face with a couple of touches of his graver. Although the age of love had long since passed away, so far as she was concerned, her serge mantilla, edged with velvet, was nevertheless wrapped round her with a certain coquetry, while she fanned herself affectedly with a great green paper fan. But probably it was not the sight of this lovely being that caused Andrès' eyes to flash with satisfaction.

The other passenger was a young girl sixteen to eighteen years of age, nearer sixteen than eighteen. Her exquisite face, slightly olive under its pallor, was framed in by a light taffeta mantilla set upon the high back of a tortoise-shell comb, round which was wound a long tress of hair. Her foot, resting on the front of

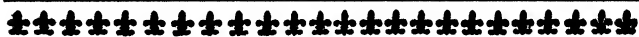


MILITONA

the calesino, and almost Chinese in size, allowed to be seen a dainty satin shoe with satin quarters and the least bit of a well-fitting silk stocking with coloured clocking. One of her hands, slender and delicate, though somewhat sunburned, toyed with the ends of her mantilla, while on the other, that lay upon a cambric handkerchief, shone a few silver rings, the richest gems in her manola casket. On her sleeves flashed jet buttons that completed her thoroughly Spanish costume.

Andrès recognised the lovely face the remembrance of which had haunted him for a week. He quickened his steps and reached the entrance to the Plaza de Toros at the same time as the calesino. The calesero had knelt down on one knee to make a step for the handsome manola, who alighted, resting her hand lightly on his shoulder. The descent of the old lady was a more complicated business, but it also was happily managed, and the two women, followed by Andrès, ascended the wooden stairs leading to the benches.

Chance, with good taste and gallantry, had caused the tickets to the seats to be so distributed that Don Andrès found himself placed right by the side of the young manola.



MILITONA



II

WHILE the spectators were noisily crowding into the amphitheatre, and the great funnel-shaped space occupied by the benches was being darkened by an ever denser multitude, the toreros were coming up one after another by a back door into the place they use as a foyer, and where they await the hour for the beginning of the *funcion*.

It is a large whitewashed room, bare and ugly. The dull yellow flames of a few tapers flicker in front of a smoky image of Our Lady, hanging on the wall, for, like all men whose profession involves the risk of sudden death, toreros are devout, or at least superstitious. Every one of them owns an amulet in which he reposes the fullest confidence; they are dismayed by certain omens, inspired by others, and they claim to know beforehand when a fight is likely to result fatally for them. But a candle timeously dedicated and burned has the power of checking fate and turning away danger. On this particular day there must have been a round dozen candles lighted, a proof of the accuracy

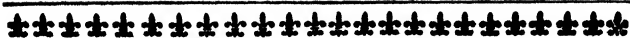


MILITONA

of the remark made by Don Andr s concerning the strength and fierceness of the bulls he had seen in the Arroyo the night before, and the points of which he had described so enthusiastically to his betrothed Feliciana, who cared for none of these things.

Some twelve toreros, chulos, and banderillos turned up, wrapped in their glazed calico capes. Every one of them, as he passed in front of the Madonna, bowed his head more or less devoutly, and having performed this duty took from a table *la copa de fuego*, a small bowl, with wooden handle, filled with coals and placed there for the greater convenience of cigarette and cigar smokers, and then puffed away as they walked up and down or seated themselves on the wooden settles placed against the walls.

One only passed in front of the picture without paying it the token of respect, and sat down by himself, crossing his legs, which, in their shining silk stockings, looked like marble. Out of the opening of his cape issued his thumb and forefinger, yellow as gold, clasping a cigarette nearly smoked out. The fire was approaching the skin at a rate that would have scorched less delicate fingers, but the torero heeded it not, absorbed as he was in his thoughts.



MILITONA

He was a man twenty-five to twenty-eight years of age; his dark complexion, black eyes, and closely curling hair showed he was an Andalusian. He certainly must have come from Seville, the earth's dark eye, the home of stout, well-built, well-set-up fellows, twangers on the guitar, tamers of horses, fighters of bulls, experts with the *navaja*, with steel muscles and quick hands. It would have been hard to match his robust frame and well-made limbs. His strength was just great enough to avoid degenerating into heaviness; he was as well fitted to be a wrestler as a runner, and if one could suppose that nature ever intended to create men specially for the purpose of making toreros of them, it was plain that it had never been so successful as when it had turned out this Hercules with the limber frame.

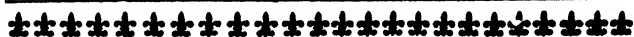
Under the parted mantle flashed in the shadow the spangles on his flame-coloured and silver-braided jacket, and the stone of the *sortija* that fastened the ends of his cravat. The stone itself was quite a valuable one and, like the rest of the costume, proved that its owner belonged to the aristocracy of his profession. His *mono*, made of new ribbons, with which the lock of hair, reserved for this purpose, was tied, spread out on the



MILITONA

nape of his neck in a broad bow ; his *montera*, of the finest black, was covered with trimmings of the same colour, and was fastened under his chin by brand-new cords ; his extraordinarily small pumps would have done honour to the cleverest Parisian bootmaker, and might have served an Opera dancer for slippers.

Nevertheless Juancho, such was his name, had not the frank, open look that becomes a handsome, well-built young chap who will presently win the applause of the fair sex. Was it a dread of the coming encounter that disturbed his serenity ? Yet the dangers run on the arena by the combatants, dangers that are not nearly as great as people are apt to fancy, ought not to have greatly troubled a fellow as athletic as was Juancho. Could he have seen in dreams an infernal bull bearing aloft on its red-hot steel horns a spitted matador ? He had not, and none of these things troubled him. He was just what he had always been, especially during the past year. Without being exactly at variance with his comrades, there was not between him and them the careless and jovial devil-may-careness of people who run the same risks. He did not repel their advances, but he never made any himself, and Andalusian though he was, he preferred to hold his



MILITONA

tongue. At times, however, he seemed anxious to rid himself of his tendency to brooding; then he would give himself up to wild excess of reckless fun. He would drink beyond reason, though usually temperate; made rows in the drinking shops, danced the cachuca in the maddest way, and wound up with a causeless quarrel in which his knife speedily took its part. The fit over, he would fall back into taciturnity and moodiness.

Half a dozen conversations were going on among the various groups; the talk turned on love, politics, and especially on bull-fighting.

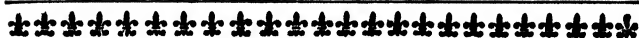
“What does your Grace think of the black Mazpula bull?” said one torero to another, with the fine ceremonious formulæ of the Spanish tongue. “Is it true that, as Arjona affirms, it is short-sighted?”

“It is short-sighted in the one eye, and long-sighted in the other. Don’t trust it.”

“And the Lizaso bull? the piebald one, you know. Which side does it gore on, think you?”

“I have no idea, for I have not seen it at work. What is your opinion, Juancho?”

“Gores from the right,” answered the latter, as if roused from a dream, and not even glancing at the young fellow standing before him.



MILITONA

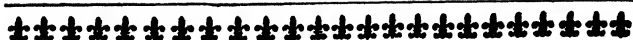
“What makes you think so?”

“It is constantly twitching its right ear, which is an almost infallible sign.”

Having uttered these words, Juancho carried to his lips the end of his *papelito*, which vanished in a pinch of white ashes.

The hour fixed for the opening of the bull-fight was approaching; all the *toreros*, save Juancho, had risen; the talk was languishing, and the dull raps of lance-thrusts against the wall were heard from an inner court, in which the *picadores* were practising to get their hand in and to familiarise themselves with their mounts. Such of the men as had not finished their cigarettes threw them away; the *chulos* coquettishly settled on their fore-arms their brilliant-hued capes, and drew up in line. Silence reigned, for the moment when the arena is to be entered is always somewhat solemn and makes the lightest-hearted a bit thoughtful.

At last Juancho rose, threw off his cloak, which fell on the bench, took his sword and his *muleta*, and joined the particoloured group. The clouds had gone from his brow; his eyes flashed brightly and he breathed hard through his expanded nostrils, while a strange expression of audacity animated his noble features. He



MILITONA

drew himself up and threw out his chest as if preparing for the combat. His feet were planted firmly on the ground, and under the tissue of his silk stockings the muscles of his instep worked like the strings of a guitar. He was limbering up his muscles, making sure they were fit, just as a soldier works his blade in its scabbard as he marches into battle.

He was really a splendid fellow, was Juancho, and his dress brought out admirably his good looks. His small waist was bound round with a broad red silk *faja*; the silver embroidery that ran adown his jacket formed on the collar, the sleeves, the pockets, and the facings stagnant places, as it were, upon which the complex arabesques were multiplied to such an extent that the stuff disappeared under them. His jacket ceased to be a flame-coloured one embroidered with silver; it became a silver jacket embroidered with flame-coloured braid. Such a mass of bullion, balls, filigree-work, knots, and ornaments of every description shimmered and glanced upon his shoulders that his arms seemed to emerge from the orifice of a couple of crowns. His satin knee-breeches, trimmed with braiding and spangles down the seams, outlined, without confining them, his iron muscles and his elegantly ro-



MILITONA

bust limbs. His costume was the masterpiece of Zapata of Granada, — Zapata, the Cardillac of major costumes, who weeps every time he brings you the coat you have ordered, and offers to buy it back for a larger price than he charged for making it. Connoisseurs considered it was worth ten thousand reals at the least, and it was worth twenty thousand when worn by Juancho.

The last blast of the trumpets had sounded; the arena was cleared of dogs and muchachos. The time had come. The picadores, pulling down over the right eye of their steeds the handkerchief that prevents their seeing the bull charging them, had joined the procession, and the company entered the arena in good order.

A murmur of admiration hailed Juancho when he came to bend the knee in front of the Queen's box; he did so with such grace, in so humble yet proud a manner, and rose so gracefully, that even the old aficionados said, "Neither Pepe Illo nor Romero, nay, not even José Candido, could have done better."

The mounted alguazil, in the black dress of a familiar of the Holy Inquisition, bore, according to custom, amid universal hooting, the key of the toril

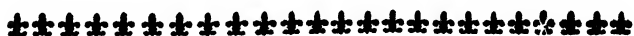


MILITONA

to the man on duty, and having performed this formality, bolted as fast as he could, rocking in his saddle, losing his stirrups, claspings his horse round the neck, and affording to the crowd the sight of the comedy of terror, which is always so amusing to spectators who are themselves in safety.

Andrès, delighted at the way luck had served him, did not pay particular attention to the preliminaries of the fight, and the bull had already ripped up a horse before he even cast a glance at the arena. He was engaged in gazing at the girl by his side with an assiduity that would no doubt have annoyed her had she noticed it. She struck him as lovelier even than the first time he had seen her. The process of idealisation, which always acts upon remembrances, and often involves disappointment when one sees again the object of one's dreams, had in no wise added to the beauty of the unknown, and it must be owned that never had a more perfect type of Spanish girl sat down upon the blue granite benches of the Madrid arena.

The young fellow, plunged in ecstasy, was admiring the clear-cut profile, the delicate nose with its rosy nostrils like the inside of a shell, the full temples on which, under a faint amber hue, showed a network of

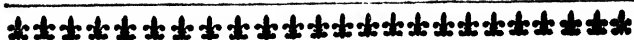


MILITONA

tenuous azure veins, the mouth blooming like a flower, savoury as a fruit, half parted by a smile, and illumined by pearly flashes, and especially the eyes whence the glance, concentrated by two thick fringes of black lashes, flashed with irresistible power.

The girl had all the purity of the Greek type, refined by Arab characteristics ; she owned the same perfection, but with a fiercer accent ; the same grace, but crueller. The ebon arch of the eyebrows was drawn so boldly upon the golden marble, the eyes themselves were of so vigorously sombre a black, the purple of the lips was so rich that such beauty as hers would have caused a certain consternation in a Paris or London drawing-room. Yet she was thoroughly in place at a bull-fight under the burning Spanish sky.

The old woman, who was not following the incidents in the arena with the same amount of attention as her young companion, was watching Andrès out of the corner of her eyes with the look of a mastiff that scents a burglar. When she was gay she looked hideous, but when she was surly she was repulsive. Her wrinkles seemed to be deeper, while the brown aureole that circled her eyes grew larger and recalled distantly the feathered circles around the eyes of owls,



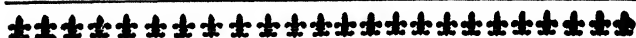
MILITONA

her boar's tusk impinged harder upon her callous lip, and a nervous tic contracted her grimacing features.

As Andrès persisted in his contemplation of the girl, the old woman's wrath grew steadily. She moved restlessly on her seat, slammed her fan, kept nudging her fair companion and put all manner of questions to her to force her to turn her head in her direction ; but, either because the girl did not understand her or did not wish to do so, she answered with a word or two and resumed her serious and attentive posture.

"The devil take the wretched old witch !" said Andrès to himself. "It is a pity the Inquisition has been done away with. With that face of hers she would have been made to ride backwards upon an ass, without trial, wearing a san-benito and a sulphur-steeped shift ; for she plainly comes from the Barahona seminary, and surely washes maids for the sabbath."

Juancho, whose turn to kill had not yet come, was standing disdainfully in the centre of the arena, paying no more attention to the bulls than if they had been sheep. He scarcely moved aside a pace or two or twisted round to avoid one of the maddened animals which threatened to charge him when they noticed him. His fine black eyes were scanning the boxes,



MILITONA

galleries, and benches, on which fluttered, like the wings of innumerable butterflies, swarms of fans of every colour. He appeared to be trying to recognise some one among the spectators. When his glance, in its circlings, fell upon the bench where sat the young girl and the old woman, his sombre face lighted up with a flash of joy, and he nodded slightly, in the way actors on the stage sometimes indulge in.

“Militona,” whispered the old woman, “Juancho has seen us, so mind what you are doing. That young fellow is making eyes at you, and Juancho is jealous.”

“What do I care?” answered Militona, in a similar tone.

“You know he is the kind of man to take it out of any one who interferes with him.”

“I have not looked at the gentleman, and besides I am my own mistress.”

But Militona was fibbing when she said she had not looked at Andrès. She had not looked straight at him, it is true, women not needing to do so in order to see any one, but she could have described him most minutely. And as a truthful historian, I am compelled to say that she considered Don Andrès de Salcedo to be, as



MILITONA

a matter of fact he was, a very handsome young gentleman.

Andrès, in order to find an opening for conversation, signed to one of the dealers in oranges, candied fruit, pastilles and other sweets, who were passing up and down the passage, and who offer their wares at the end of a pole to such of the spectators as they believe to be sparking. Andrès' neighbour was so pretty that the dealer was standing near, reckoning upon a sure sale.

"May I offer you some of these pastilles, señorita?" said Andrès to his neighbour, with an engaging smile, at the same time proffering the open box.

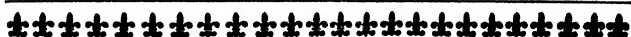
The girl turned round quickly and looked at Andrès with surprise and anxiety.

"They are flavoured with lemon and peppermint," added Andrès, as if to help her to make up her mind.

Militona, suddenly doing so, dipped her slender fingers into the box and took a few pastilles.

"Lucky Juancho's back is turned," grumbled a man of the people who was sitting near, "else there would be blood spilt this evening."

"Will you not have some, Madam?" went on Andrès, in the most polite tone, as he handed the box to the hideous old hag, who was so utterly disconcerted



MILITONA

by the audacity of the act that she took all the pastilles that were left. Nevertheless, while emptying the box into her hand, black as a mummy's, she glanced furtively and timidly at the arena, then drew a deep sigh of relief.

Just at this moment the band played the death-call. It was Juancho's turn to kill. He proceeded to the ayuntamiento's box, bowed, and asked leave in conformity with the rule, then threw his montera in the air with the most fetching coolness. The usually noisy audience became suddenly still, and every one felt the oppression of expectation.

The bull Juancho had to slay was most formidable. I must be forgiven for not having told its exploits in detail, so taken up with Andrès and Militona have I been. It had stretched out seven horses, after ripping them up, and where they had fallen in their agony the lanky corpses showing out on the sand bore witness to its strength and fury. The two picadores had gone off sorely bruised and nearly maimed, while the *sobre-saliente* (understudy) was waiting in the passage, seated on his horse, and lance in rest, in readiness to take the place of his chiefs now unable to appear. The chulos remained prudently in the neighbourhood of the barrier, one foot



MILITONA

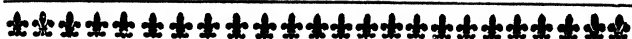
on the wooden rest by means of which they can vault over in case of danger, and the victorious bull was raging unchecked over the arena, stained here and there with great pools of blood on which the attendants dared not scatter dust, ramming the doors, and tossing the dead horses it came upon.

“Keep it up, my boy,” said an aficionado of the lower classes, addressing himself to the angry brute. “Enjoy yourself while you may; skip round, jump about. You will not be quite so gay presently, for Juancho will quiet you.”

And indeed Juancho was walking towards the monstrous brute with the firm, resolute mien that makes lions themselves retreat.

The bull, amazed to find it still had an adversary, stopped, bellowed, shook the slaver from its mouth, pawed the earth with its hoof, lowered its front two or three times and drew back a few steps.

Juancho was magnificent: his features expressed inflexible resolution; his eyes, with their fixed glance, the pupils surrounded with white looking like stars of jet, flashed invisible rays that riddled the bull like arrows of steel. Unconsciously he was subjecting it to the magnetism which enabled Van Amburgh, the



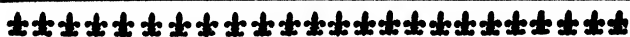
MILITONA

lion tamer, to drive trembling tigers cowering into the corners of their dens.

For every step the man took forward, the fierce brute took one backwards.

At the sight of this triumph of moral over brute force, the audience, carried away by enthusiasm, burst out into frantic applause, cries, and stamping of feet that were perfectly deafening. The amateurs clanged as hard as they could the bells and gongs they bring to fights for the purpose of making the most noise possible. The ceilings were cracking under the tumultuous admiration of the spectators in the galleries, and the paint, coming off in flakes, flew away in clouds of whitish pellicles.

The torero thus applauded, his eyes flashing, his heart swelling, looked up towards the place where was Militona, as if to lay at her feet the cheers shouted at him on all hands, and to present them to her as an homage. But the moment was ill chosen. Militona had let fall her fan, and Don Andrès, who had dashed down to pick it up, — with all the eagerness displayed in turning the smallest chances to account, for the purpose of strengthening by one thread more the frail link of a new acquaintanceship, — was handing it to



MILITONA

her with an air of great happiness and the most lover-like gesture imaginable.

The young girl could not but thank Andrès for his polite attention with a pretty smile and a graceful inclination of the head.

Juancho caught sight of the smile; his lips blanched, he turned green, his eyes became bloodshot, his hand contracted on the handle of the muleta, and with his sword, which he carried point down, he unconsciously dug holes in the sand.

The bull, no longer overawed by the man's fascinating glance, was drawing nearer its adversary without the latter remembering to be on his guard, and the space between the man and the brute was diminishing frightfully.

"The fellow is not easily scared," said some of the spectators, used to violent emotions.

"Take care, Juancho," said others, more humane. "Juancho of my life, Juancho of my heart, Juancho of my soul, the bull is almost upon you!"

As for Militona, whether the habit of witnessing bull-fights had hardened her feelings, or whether she trusted in Juancho's supreme skill, or again whether she felt but little interest in the man upon whom she



MILITONA

exerted such influence, her face remained calm and serene as though nothing were the matter. She merely flushed a little, and her bosom rose a little more quickly under the lace of her mantilla.

The cries of the spectators drew Juancho from his state of stupor. He threw himself back abruptly and waved the scarlet folds of his muleta before the bull's eyes.

The instinct of self-preservation and the gladiator's self-love struggled in Juancho's breast with the longing to see what Militona was doing. But a single look aside, a single second of forgetfulness might imperil his life at this supreme moment. It was an infernal situation. He was jealous, and saw by the side of the woman he loved an attractive and attentive young fellow, while he himself stood in the centre of the arena, the focus for the eyes of twelve thousand spectators, and the horns of a maddened brute within two inches of him, — a brute that must be slain in a certain place and in a certain way under pain of dishonour!

The torero, once more master of the *jurisdiction*, as it is called in tauromachy, settled himself firmly on his feet, and made several passes with the muleta to force the bull to look down.

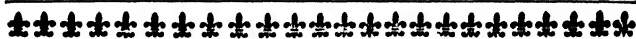
MILITONA

“What could that young spark, that young beggar be saying to her that she was smiling so sweetly?” thought Juancho, forgetful that he was in presence of a redoubtable adversary; and involuntarily he looked up.

The bull, profiting by Juancho’s absent-mindedness, charged him; Juancho, caught unawares, sprang back and with an almost mechanical motion struck out at hap-hazard. The steel penetrated some inches into the brute, but having struck the wrong place met the bone, and, shaken off by the enraged animal, flashed out of the wound with a jet of blood, to fall some distance away. Juancho was disarmed and the bull very much alive, for the false stroke had merely exasperated its fury. The chulos ran up, waving their red and blue capes.

Militona had paled a little, and the old woman was uttering exclamations and groaning like a stranded cachalot.

At the sight of the unaccountable lack of skill displayed by Juancho, the spectators broke out into a row such as Spaniards excel in. It was a perfect storm of insulting epithets, of howls and curses. “Fuera! fuera!” they cried on all hands. “Dog! Thief! Murderer! To the galleys with him! Send him to



MILITONA

Ceuta ! To go and spoil such a fine bull ! Maladroit butcher ! Executioner ! ” In a word, all that Southern exuberance, which always goes to extremes, can suggest on such occasions.

Meanwhile Juancho remained standing under the storm of opprobrium, biting his lips and tearing with his free hand the lace on his ruffled shirt. His sleeve, ripped open by the bull’s horn, showed a long purple scar down his arm. Once he staggered, and it looked as if he were about to fall a prey to his emotions, but he quickly pulled himself together, ran to his sword, as if he had made up his mind to do a particular thing, picked it up, pressed it with his foot to straighten out the bent blade, and placed himself so as to have his back to the spot where Militona was sitting.

At a sign from him, the chulos brought up the bull by fluttering their capes at it, and this time, free from all preoccupation, he struck the blow from above downwards, in accordance with rule, and in a way that the great Montès de Chiclana himself would have approved.

The sword, planted in the small of the neck, stood up with its cross hilt between the bull’s horns, and recalled the mediæval pictures in which Saint Hubert is



MILITONA

seen kneeling before a stag bearing a crucifix between its antlers. The bull knelt heavily in front of Juancho, as if to do homage to his superiority, and after a brief convulsion rolled over with its four feet in the air.

“Juancho has brilliantly made up for his mistake! What a splendid stroke that was! I prefer him to Arjona and Chiclana. What is your opinion, señorita?” said Andrès enthusiastically to his fair neighbour.

“For God’s sake, sir, do not speak another word to me!” returned Militona quickly, almost without moving her lips, and keeping her head turned away.

The words were spoken in so imperative and yet at the same time so suppliant a tone that Andrès saw at once they were widely different from the “Now, do stop!” of a girl who does not in the least want you to stop. It was not maidenly modesty that had made her speak thus; for Andrès’ attempts at conversation had not been of a nature to merit such a rebuff; and then manolas, who are to Madrid what grisettes are to Paris, are not usually so terribly strait-laced.

Real terror, the dread of a danger which Andrès could not perceive, made itself felt in the short sentence, spoken sideways and which itself appeared to be perilous.



MILITONA

“Can she be a princess in disguise?” said Andrès to himself, very much puzzled and wondering what he had best do. “If I say nothing more, I shall look like a fool, or at least like an inferior sort of Don Juan. On the other hand, if I insist on talking to her, I may get the girl into an unpleasant scrape. I wonder if it is the duenna she is afraid of. It cannot be, since the dear creature devoured all my pastilles; she is a bit of an accomplice, therefore, and it is not of her that my Infanta is afraid. Could there be anywhere round here a brother of hers, or a jealous husband, or father?”

But among all the people in Militona’s vicinity none could be counted as coming under any of these designations; they had commonplace features, and were all ordinary-looking. It was plain that they were in no way connected with the lovely manola.

As long as the fight lasted Juancho did not once look towards the tendido side, and despatched the two bulls he had to slay with unequalled skill, so that he was cheered as wildly as he had been hooted.

Andrès, whether he believed it prudent not to renew the conversation after the words the alarmed and supplicating tone of which had moved him, or whether he



MILITONA

could not think of a skilful way of renewing the talk, said not another word to Militona, and even rose a few minutes before the end of the fight.

As he stepped over the benches on his way out, he whispered a few directions to a bright-looking, alert lad, and then disappeared. The young rascal, as soon as the spectators started to leave, took care to walk in the crowd, without affectation and with the most indifferent air, behind Militona and the duenna. He allowed them to get into their calesino; then, as if yielding to a boyish impulse, when the carriage rolled away on its high scarlet wheels, he hung on to the body with feet and hands, shouting out the popular song of the Puerto bulls.

The calesino went off in a whirlwind of noise and dust.

“Good,” said Andrès to himself, as from one of the walks in the Prado, for he had already got thus far, he watched the vehicle drive by at full speed, while the muchacho still hung on behind; “by this evening I shall know the address of that lovely girl—and may Bellini’s duet rest lightly on my soul!”



MILITONA

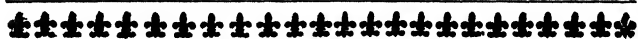


III

THE lad was to report to Don Andrès, who was waiting for him, while smoking a cigar, in one of the walks on the Prado, close by the monument to the men who fell on May 2.

While puffing out the smoke that rose in blue spirals, Andrès was calling himself to account, and could not help confessing that he was, if not in love, at least deeply interested in the beautiful manola. Even had not the girl's loveliness sufficed to set on fire the least inflammable of hearts, the sort of mystery involved in the terror she had manifested when Andrès had spoken to her could not fail to rouse the curiosity of any young fellow at all adventurous. At twenty-five one need not be Don Quixote de la Mancha to be always ready to defend princesses one believes to be oppressed.

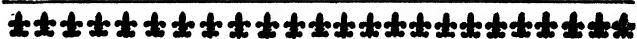
But in all this business where did Feliciana, the well brought-up young lady, come in? Andrès would have been puzzled to reply to that inquiry. He reflected, however, that he was not to be married to her before six



MILITONA

months, and concluded that this little love affair might easily be brought to a head, broken off, and forgotten before the fatal day came round, and that, besides, it was exceedingly easy to conceal an intrigue of this sort. It should be his last bit of wildness as a bachelor, for in the world it is called folly to love a graceful and charming girl, and wisdom to marry an ugly, surly, and unpleasant person. Once that was over, he would lead the life of a hermit, of a sage, of a regular martyr to marriage.

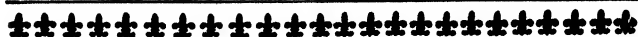
Having thus settled matters in his own mind, Andrès gave himself up to the most agreeable reveries. He was held down by Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios to a rule of propriety and decorous amusements that weighed greatly upon him, though he dared not protest against it. He had to conform to innumerable English habits, to drinking tea, to playing the piano, to wearing yellow kid gloves, white cravats, patent leather boots, without extenuating circumstances, to walking through dances, to talking of the latest fashions and of the great airs in Italian opera, all which things were singularly repugnant to his naturally bright and lively disposition. Whether he would or not, the old Spanish blood in his veins was rebelling against the invasion of Northern civilisation.



MILITONA

Believing himself already the fortunate lover of the young manola of the bull-ring — for what man is there who is not somewhat conceited, in the privacy of his thoughts at least ? — he could see himself in the girl's little room, his coat off, enjoying a collation of pastry, oranges, and candied fruits, washed down with more or less genuine Peralta and Pedro Ximenès wines fetched by the tia from the nearest shop dealing in good liquor. The lovely girl, taking a *papel de hilo* stained with liquorice juice, rolled up in the thin tissue a few shreds of tobacco cut from a trabuco, and presented him with a cigarette made in the most perfect manner.

Then, pushing back the table with her foot, she took down a guitar from the wall, handed it to her lover, and slipping on a pair of pomegranate-wood castanets, which she fastened to her thumbs, drawing tight the band that holds them with her pearly teeth, she started to dance, with a litheness and an expression truly wonderful, some one of the old Spanish dances in which Arabia has left its ardent languor and its mysterious passion, the while she breathed with panting voice an old couplet of a *seguidilla* at once incoherent and quaint, but filled with penetrating poetry.

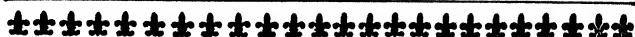


MILITONA

While Andrès was losing himself so completely in his voluptuous imaginations that he was marking the time of the castanets by cracking his fingers, the sun was rapidly sinking and the shadows were growing longer. The dinner hour was approaching,—for nowadays in Madrid the best society sits down to table at the same hour as people do in Paris and London,—yet his messenger had not returned. Even though the girl lived at the other end of the city, at the San Joachim or the San Jerónimo Gate, the young rascal had had time and more than time to go there and back twice over, especially in view of the fact that he had been able to perform the first part of the journey upon the back of the carriage.

The delay surprised and greatly annoyed Andrès, who did not know where to look for his emissary and thus saw an adventure that had promised so well stopped at the very outset. For where could he find a clue, considering that he had not the least indication to guide him, not a point, not a name even, and that he must trust to the chapter of luck, notoriously unreliable?

“Something may have happened that I cannot guess. Let me wait a few minutes longer,” said he to himself.



MILITONA

Profiting by the gift of ubiquity accorded to every story-teller, I shall follow the calesino on its rapid way. At first it had driven by the Prado, then had turned down the Calle de San Juan, Andrès' emissary still hanging on with feet and hands to the back springs; next it had entered the Calle de los Desemparados, but when about half-way down the street, the driver, noticing that he was carrying extra weight, had let fly at poor Perico so skilful a cut of the whip that he had slashed him across the face, and compelled him to let go his hold.

When the boy had rubbed his eyes filled with tears of pain, and had recovered his powers of sight, the calesino was already at the end of the Calle de la Fé, and the rumble of its wheels over the pavement was growing fainter. Perico, who, like all Spaniards, was a capital runner, and was filled with a sense of the importance of his mission, started at his best pace after it, and would unquestionably have caught up the vehicle if it had kept on a straight course. But at the end of the street it turned round a corner and Perico lost sight of it for a minute. When he got to the corner in his turn, the calesino had vanished. It had entered the net-work of streets and lanes in the neigh-



MILITONA

bourhood of the Plaza de Lavapiès. The boy could not tell whether it had gone down the Calle del Povar, de Santa Inès, de las Damas, or de San Lorenzo. He went through each of them in turn, in hopes of seeing the calesino in front of a door in one of them, but his expectation was doomed to disappointment. All he saw was the vehicle returning empty, and the driver cracking his whip, as if in ironical threatening, and hastening back for another fare.

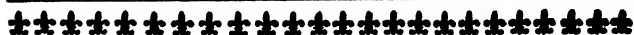
Vexed at having been unable to accomplish what Andrès had charged him to do, Perico tramped for a time through the streets where he fancied the calesino might have deposited its passengers, concluding, with the precocious understanding of love that marks Southern children, that so pretty a girl could not fail to have a lover; that consequently she would be at the window to watch for his coming, or that she would be going out to meet him if he did not turn up,—the Day of Bulls being devoted, in Madrid, to walks, parties of pleasure, and enjoyment. His reasoning was sound enough, and there were indeed many pretty faces smiling out of the windows and bending over the balconies, but not one of them was that of the manola he had been set to follow. Tired out at last, he washed his

MILITONA

eyes in the Lavapiès fountain, and started for the Prado to report to Don Andrès. While he could not tell him the exact address, he had at least made nearly sure that the fair dwelt in one of the four streets I have named, and as they are all three very short, it would be easier to discover her than by seeking her out in the whole of Madrid.

Had Perico remained a few minutes longer, he would have seen a second calesino stop in front of a house in the Calle del Povar, and a man, with his hat pulled well down over his face and his cloak well up round it, spring lightly from the carriage and enter the passage. As he leapt down, the cape opened and a glitter of spangles, and a well turned leg, clothed in silk stockings spotted with blood, became visible.

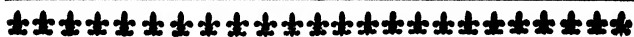
The reader has recognised Juancho, for it was he. But Perico had no idea of any connection between Juancho and Militona, so that the sight of him would not have afforded the lad a clue to the home of the girl. Besides, Juancho might be returning to his own dwelling, as indeed was most likely, since, after so exciting an experience as he had had, he must have felt the need of rest and of putting compresses upon the scar on his arm, the horns of a bull being



MILITONA

poisonous and the wounds inflicted by them slow to heal.

Perico hastened back to the Obelisk of May 2, where Andrès had appointed to meet him, but experienced another disappointment. Andrès was not alone. Doña Feliciana, who had gone out to make a purchase with a friend, whom she was driving home, had caught sight of her lover walking about with feverish impatience. She and her friend had got down from the carriage, and approaching Andrès she had asked him if it was for the purpose of composing a sonnet or a madrigal that he was wandering about under the trees at a time when less poetical mortals were devoting themselves to the comforting of the inner man. The unfortunate Andrès, caught in the very act of entering upon an intrigue, could not keep back a blush, and stammered a few commonplace compliments; but though he smiled outwardly, inwardly he was raging. Perico, not sure of what he had best do, kept circling in a hesitating way round the trio; young though he was, he understood it would not do to give a gentleman a manola's address in the presence of a lady so beautifully dressed in French fashion. But he could not help wondering why a gentleman who was acquainted



MILITONA

with such fine bonnet-wearing ladies should be interested in a manola.

“What is the matter with that boy? He keeps looking at us with his big black eyes as if he wanted to eat us up.”

“I suppose he is waiting to get the end of my cigar,” replied Andrès, as he threw the stump and made a quiet sign that meant, “Come back when I am rid of these people.”

The boy drew off, and pulling a flint and steel from his pocket, lighted the cigar and puffed away at it like a true smoker.

But Andrès was not yet out of the wood. Feliciano struck her forehead with her gloved hand, and said, as if suddenly recollecting something: “Goodness me! I was so taken up with our Bellini duet when you were at the house that I forgot to tell you that Don Geronimo, my father, expects you at dinner. He meant to write you this morning, but as I was to see you this afternoon, I told him it was not worth his while doing so. It is pretty late now,” she went on, looking at a little watch the size of a thumb-nail. “You had better get into the carriage; we can drive Rosa home and then go back to the house together.”



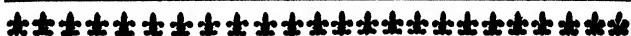
MILITONA

Let no one be surprised that this well brought-up young lady should propose to a young gentleman to drive with her, for on the back seat of the carriage sat an English governess, stiff as a poker, red as a lobster, straight and stark in the longest of corsets, and whose mere appearance would put to fright love and gossip.

There was no getting out of it; so after having assisted Feliciano and her friend to get in, he sat down by Miss Sarah's side, irritated at having been unable to hear Perico's report, believing the lad to know more than he actually did, and with the prospect of an indefinitely prolonged musical evening.

I fancy the description of the dinner would not prove particularly interesting to my readers, so I shall start in search of Militona, trusting to be more fortunate than Perico.

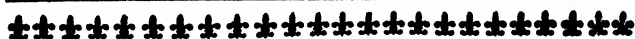
Militona did, as a matter of fact, live in one of the streets settled upon as her place of abode by Andrès' young spy. It would be difficult to assign the house in which she dwelt, as well as many others, to any particular order of architecture, save, perhaps, the composite. The placing of the windows, no two of which were alike, had been the work of fancy. The builder appeared to have aimed at the inversion of symmetry,



MILITONA

for no one part on the higgledy-piggledy façade corresponded to any other: the walls, almost all out of plumb, bellied out and seemed to be settling down under their own weight; they were with difficulty upheld by iron clamps and rods in the form of S's and crosses, and but for the rather more solid houses on either side, against which it leaned, it would infallibly have crashed into the street. On the lower part, the plaster, broken away, allowed the mud walls to show; the upper part, in a better state of preservation, had retained traces of the former pink wash, that looked like the blushes of the poor building ashamed of its wretchedness.

Near a roof of tumbling tiles, its brown crest, broken here and there, showing against the blue sky, smiled a little window the framework of which had been recently whitewashed. On the right hand side a cage held a quail, and on the left, another and exceedingly small one, adorned with beads of red and yellow glass, formed a palace and a prison for a cricket; for the Spaniards, who acquired from the Arabs the love of persistent rhythms, are very fond of the monotonous, regularly cadenced song of the quail and the cricket. A porous earthenware jar, hung by a string fastened to

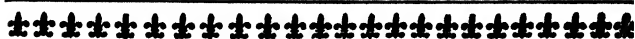


MILITONA

the handles, and covered with pearly dew, was cooling the water in the rising evening breeze, and let fall a few drops upon a couple of pots of sweet-basil placed under it. The window was that of Militona's room, and from the street any one would have guessed that the nest was inhabited by a young bird, for youth and loveliness tell even on inanimate things and stamp them with their own character.

If my reader is not afraid to follow me up the begrimed stairs with their shiny wall, we may follow Militona who is springing up the steps with the elasticity of a pair of eighteen-year-old legs. She is already bathed in the light of the upper stories, while tia Aldonza, still involved in the darksome limbo of the lower stair, is groaning like Saint Joseph and hanging desperately with both hands to the slippery rope.

The handsome girl, lifting the piece of matting laid in front of the door with many panels, of the kind so common in Madrid, picked up her key and opened. Her poor little room could scarcely tempt thieves, and did not require that the door should be very carefully bolted, so when she went out Militona was in the habit of leaving it open. When she was at home, on the other hand, she bolted it carefully, for there then was in the

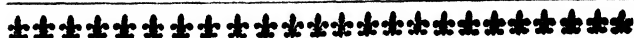


MILITONA

humble abode a treasure that drew not robbers, but lovers.

The walls had, for hangings and paper, a mere coat of whitewash; a mirror with much scratched silvering reflected most imperfectly the lovely face that consulted it; a plaster statuette of Saint Anthony, flanked by a couple of blue vases containing artificial flowers, a deal table, two chairs, and a little bed covered with a muslin counterpane, with vandyked valance, formed the whole of the furniture. I must not omit a few pictures of Our Lady and of Saints, painted and gilded on glass with Byzantine or Russian simplicity, a picture of the "Fight on the Second of May," the "Funeral of Daoiz and Velarde," a "Picador on horseback," after Goya, and a tambourine forming a pendant for a guitar. In accordance with the mingling of the sacred and the profane, which does not startle the ardent faith of really Catholic countries, there rose between the two instruments of joy and pleasure a tall curly palm-branch, brought back from church on Palm-Sunday.

Such was Militona's room, and although it contained no more than what was necessary, it had not the bare, cold look of poverty. It was illumined by a bright sunbeam; the vivid red of the bricked flooring was



MILITONA

pleasant to the eye ; no ugly shadow could cling with bat-wings in the dazzlingly white corners ; no spider spun its web between the joists of the ceiling ; everything was bright, smiling, and gay in the little room with its four walls. In England it would have been the abode of deepest wretchedness ; in Spain, it was almost comfort, and more of it than was needed to be happier than in Paradise itself.

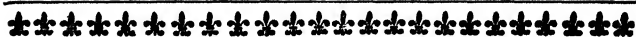
The old woman had at last managed to climb to the top of the stairs. She entered the charming nook and sank down on one of the two chairs, which creaked in alarming fashion under her weight.

“ Please, Militona,” said she, “ take down the jar and let me have a drink. I am choking and dying with thirst ; the dust in that place and those abominable peppermint drops have set my throat in a flame.”

“ You should not have eaten them in handfuls, tia,” smilingly replied the girl as she put the jar to the old woman’s lips.

Aldonza drank two or three mouthfuls, wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, and rapidly fanned herself without a word.

“ Talking of pastilles,” she said presently, with a sigh, “ how angrily Juancho was looking at us. I am



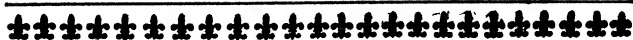
MILITONA

sure he missed the bull because that good-looking gentleman was talking to you ; he is as jealous as a tiger, is Juancho, and if he managed to find him, I warrant you he made him sorry. I would not give much for the young chap's skin, for it runs the risk of being slit up with mighty fine slashing. Do you remember what a fine slice he took out of that Luca who wanted to present you with a nosegay at the Romeria de San Isidoro ? ”

“ I hope Juancho will not go to such unpleasant lengths. I begged that young gentleman not to speak to me again, so firmly and so beseechingly that he never spoke another word. He understood I was frightened and took pity on me. But it is abominable to be pursued by such tyrannical and ferocious love.”

“ It's your own fault,” replied the old woman. “ You should not be so pretty.”

A sharp rap at the door, like one struck by an iron hand, interrupted the conversation of the two women. The older rose and peeped through the little grated wicket, closed with a panel, cut breast-high in the door, according to Spanish custom. In the opening showed Juancho's face, pale under the bronzed tint it had acquired under the hot sun of the arena.



MILITONA

Aldonza opened the door and Juancho entered. His face bore traces of the violent emotion he had felt in the arena: it betokened concentrated rage, for, with his vulgar idea of honour, applause did not compensate for hisses. He considered he was dishonoured and obliged to perform the rashest deeds in order to regain the good opinion of the public and his own.

What mainly maddened him, however, and caused his rage to be so intense, was that he had been unable to leave the ring soon enough to catch up the young fellow who had seemed so attentive to Militona, and that he did not know where to look for him now. He felt sure the man had followed her and spoken to her again, and as the thought came into his mind, his hand mechanically sought the knife in his belt.

He sat down on the one other chair. Militona, leaning against the window-sill, was biting at the capsule of a red carnation stripped of its petals; the old woman was fanning by way of trying to look unconcerned. None of the three spoke until Aldonza broke the silence.

“Does your arm pain you much still, Juancho?” said she.



MILITONA

“No,” replied the torero, fixing an inquisitive glance upon Militona.

“You ought to put salt and water compresses upon it,” went on the old woman, endeavouring to keep up the conversation.

But Juancho answered her not, and as if haunted by the one thought, turned on Militona.

“Who was the young fellow sitting next you at the bull-fight?”

“I do not know; that was the first time I had seen him.”

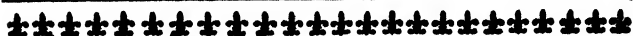
“You would like to know him, though?”

“You are rude; but suppose that were the case?”

“If it were the case, I should kill that handsome coxcomb in patent-leather boots, white kids, and frock coat.”

“Juancho, you talk like a madman. I have never given you the right to be jealous of me. You say you love me, but that is no fault of mine, and I see no reason why, because you think me pretty, I should take to adoring you.”

“She is quite right; she is not bound to do so,” said the old woman. “Yet the pair of you would make a handsome couple. No daintier hand would



MILITONA

ever have rested upon a stronger arm, and if you were to dance the cachuca in Las Delicias gardens, people would stand on their chairs to see you."

"Have I ever coquetted with you, Juancho? Have I ever tried to attract you by glances, smiles, or witching ways?"

"No," answered the torero in a hollow voice.

"I have never promised you anything and have never given you any reason to hope. I have always told you to forget me. Why, then, do you torment and offend me with your unjustifiable brutality? Because I have taken your fancy, must my every glance be a sentence of death? Are you to drive every one from me? You crippled that poor Luca, a dear fellow who entertained and amused me, and you seriously wounded your friend Ginès, because he had touched my hand. Do you suppose that you help on your cause by such doings? To-day you behaved absurdly in the ring; while you were engaged in spying upon me you allowed the bull to come upon you, and you struck a vile stroke."

"It is because I love you, Militona, with all the strength of my soul, with all the fire of the blood that burns in my veins. It is because I can see no one in



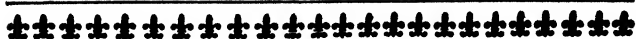
MILITONA

the world but you, and if a bull were to gore me while you are smiling upon another man, I should not look round. I am not gentle-mannered, it is true, for my youth was spent in fighting wild brutes; every day I have to kill and run the risk of being killed. I cannot be soft like those youngsters, delicate and slender as women, who waste their time having their hair curled and reading the papers. One thing is sure: if you are not mine, you shall never belong to any other man!" went on Juancho, after a pause, as he smote the table with his fist, and, having, as it were, summed up his case in the blow.

Then he rose abruptly, and went out grumbling: —

"I'll manage to find him and stick six inches of cold steel into him!"

And now let me return to Andrès, who, sitting piteously in front of the piano, is performing his part in the Bellini duet with a wealth of false notes that is driving Feliciano to despair. Never had a party in an aristocratic house filled him with greater weariness, and he was inwardly consigning the Marchioness de Benavidès and her tertulia to the devil. The delicate, pure profile of the young manola, her jet black hair, her Arab eyes, her wild grace, her picturesque cos-



MILITONA

tume caused him to take little pleasure in the contemplation of the turbaned dowagers who thronged the Marchioness' drawing-room. He came to the conclusion that his betrothed was unquestionably ugly, and left the place very much in love with Militona.

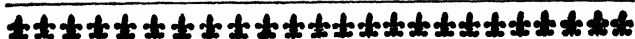
As he was going down the Calle d'Alcala on his way home, he felt some one tugging at the tails of his coat. It was Perico, who, having made additional discoveries, was anxious to give an account of his mission and, it may be, to receive the douro he had been promised.

"If you please, sir," said the boy, "she lives in the Calle del Povar, in the third house on the right. I saw her just now at her window taking down the water-cooler."

MILITONA

IV

IT is all very well to know where is my love's nest," said Don Andrès to himself on waking after a night's sleep in which Militona's graceful form had more than once appeared to him. "The question is how can I reach her? How am I to manage that? I do not see very well what I can do save prowl up and down in front of her house, and study the ways of the place. But if I go down into that neighbourhood in my usual dress, that is, rigged out like the latest Paris fashion-plate, I shall attract attention, and be unable to carry out my reconnoitring properly. She is bound to come out or go in some time or other, for I do not suppose she has six months' supply of sweets and nuts in her room. Then I shall accost her as she passes with a neatly turned compliment, and ascertain if she is as stand-offish in conversation as she proved to be at the bull-fight. Let me go to the Rastro to buy wherewithal to transform myself from a fashionable fellow into a manolo; once disguised in this way, I shall not excite the suspicion of any jealous



MILITONA

lover or ugly-tempered brother, and I shall be able to learn much about my beauty without awakening doubts as to my real character."

Having thus settled upon his plan of action, Andrès rose, swallowed quickly a cup of chocolate, and proceeded to the Rastro, which is to Madrid what the Temple is to Paris, a place where anything may be bought, save what is new. He felt elated and happy; not for a moment had it occurred to him that the girl might not love him or might be in love with some one else; he was endowed with a trustfulness that rarely deceives one, for it is, as it were, the divination of sympathy, and the old Spanish love of adventure was awaking in him. He enjoyed the idea of disguising himself, and although the Infanta to be won was but a manola, he counted on enjoying walking about under her window in his dun-coloured cloak, while the danger indicated by the terror the girl had exhibited took from the undertaking any touch of commonplaceness.

While turning over in his mind innumerable stratagems of the kind that run counter to one another and are never of any use when the time comes, Andrès reached the Rastro.

It is a queer place, that Rastro. Imagine a steep



MILITONA

plateau, a sort of mound surrounded by mean and unhealthy houses in which all manner of suspicious businesses are carried on. On the plateau and in the adjacent streets are to be found second-hand shops of the lowest class, dealers in cast-off clothing, in junk, in old rags, broken bottles, in everything that is ancient, filthy, ragged, of no further use. Yet stains and holes, unrecognisable fragments of things, earthenware chips from the street corners, nails fished out of the gutter find purchasers in this place. It is an odd medley, in which tatters of all sorts meet in strangely philosophical fashion: an old court uniform, with the lace stripped off, rubs elbows with a peasant's jacket, with its facings of many colours; the ballet-dancer's skirt with its tarnished spangles hangs by the side of a rusty and patched cassock; picadors' stirrups are mixed up with artificial flowers, odd volumes, blackened and yellowed paintings, and portraits that interest nobody. Rabelais and Balzac would find material there for a four-page description.

But if one goes up towards the square, there are a few shops of a better class in which may be found suits of clothes which, though no longer new, are still clean and may be worn by others than subjects of the



MILITONA

picaresque realm. It was into one of these that Andrès made his way.

He selected a fairly new manolo costume which, when fresh from the tailor's, must have enabled its owner to make many a conquest in the Calle San Luis, the Calle del Barquillo, and the Plaza Santa Ana. It consisted of a hat with truncated crown, the brim turned up like a turban and trimmed with velvet, a round jacket the shade of Spanish tobacco, with small buttons, wide trousers, a broad silk sash, and a dark-coloured cloak. The whole costume had been worn just long enough to lose its first gloss, but did not lack for elegance.

Andrès, having looked at himself in a tall bevelled Venetian mirror in a magnificent frame, though it would have been hard to say how it had got there, was satisfied with his appearance, and indeed the dress set off his handsome, well-set-up figure in a way to win every tender heart in Lavapiès.

He paid for the clothes and had them put aside, telling the dealer that he would return in the evening to put them on in his shop, for he did not wish to be seen leaving his own house in disguise.

On his way back, he passed through the Calle del Povar, and at once recognised the white-framed win-



MILITONA

dow and the hanging jar of which Perico had told him. There was, however, no sign of any one being in the room, a carefully drawn muslin curtain making the panes opaque from the exterior.

“No doubt she has gone out to attend to some work, and will return at the end of the day only, for she must be a seamstress, a cigar-maker, an embroiderer, or something of the sort,” said Andrès, as he went on.

But Militona had not gone out; she was bending over her table and putting together the parts of a bodice outspread before her. Although she was not engaged in any mysterious occupation, she had shot the bolt of her door, no doubt fearing an undesired call from Juancho, a call that would have been more dangerous for her in view of the old woman's absence.

While she worked she thought of the young fellow who had looked at her the day before, at the bull-fight, with such warm and soft glances, and who had whispered words in a voice that still sounded sweetly in her ears.

“I do hope he will not try to see me again, though I should be glad if he did. But Juancho would pick some dreadful quarrel with him, and kill him, perhaps, or at least wound him grievously, as he has every man



MILITONA

who has sought my favour. Even if I could get rid of that tyrannical Juancho,—which is not likely, seeing he followed me from Granada to Seville, and from Seville to Madrid, and would pursue me to the ends of the world in order to prevent my bestowing on any one else the love I will not give him—even then, what would it avail me? That young gentleman belongs to a higher station in life than I do; it is plain from his dress that he is both noble and rich. His fancy for me is probably but a passing one, and I dare say he has already forgotten me.”

I am bound to say that at this point the girl’s brow clouded slightly and that a long breath, uncommonly like a sigh, swelled her surcharged bosom.

“He surely has a mistress, or is engaged to a young, beautiful, fashionable girl, who owns fine bonnets and costly shawls. How well he would look in a jacket embroidered in coloured silks, with silver filigree buttons, Ronda stitched boots, and a small Andalusian hat! And how neat his figure would be if he wore a handsome Gibraltar silk sash!” said Militona, continuing her monologue, in the course of which, led on by her innocent heart, she dressed Andrès in a costume that brought him nearer to her.



MILITONA

She had got so far in her castle-building when Aldonza, who lived in the same house, knocked at the door.

"Did you know, my dear," said she to Militona, "that that mad Juancho, instead of going to have his arm dressed, spent the whole night walking up and down under your window, no doubt in order to ascertain if the young fellow we saw at the bull-fight happened to be roaming round? He made sure you had appointed a meeting with him, and a pretty mess it would have been if you had! Why cannot you love poor Juancho? He would leave you alone then."

"Please do not talk so; I am not responsible for a love I have not in any way provoked."

"Of course the young gentleman of the Plaza de Toros," continued the old woman, "is very handsome too, and very gallant. He offered me the box of pastilles most gracefully and with all the respect due to my sex, but I am interested in Juancho, and I fear him like the devil. He considers me in the light of your chaperon, and would be quite capable of holding me responsible if you preferred any one to him. He keeps such a close watch upon you that it would be very difficult to conceal anything from him."



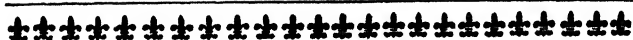
MILITONA

“From the way you talk one would really think I was already on the most intimate terms with the gentleman, though I can scarcely remember what he looks like,” returned Militona, with a blush.

“If you do not remember him, I can tell you he remembers you. He could draw your portrait from memory, for he never took his eyes off you the whole time the fight lasted. He looked just as if he were in ecstasy in front of a Madonna.”

As she listened to these proofs of Andrès’ love, Militona bent silently over her work, and a sense of happiness hitherto unknown to her filled her heart.

Juancho, for his part, was far from entertaining such gentle sentiments. Shut up in his room, decorated with swords and the colours of bulls that he had snatched off at the peril of his life in order to present them to Militona, who had declined them, he was indulging in the self-worry customary to rejected lovers. He could not understand why Militona should not love him; her aversion for him was a problem he could not solve, and the answer to which he sought for in vain. Was he not young, handsome, strong, full of fire and courage? Had not the fairest hands in Spain applauded him time and again? Were not



MILITONA

his costumes as richly embroidered with gold and trimmed with as many ornaments as those of the most stylish toreros? Was not his portrait sold everywhere, lithographed, printed on silk handkerchiefs, with an aureole of laudatory couplets, like the portraits of the masters of the art? Except Montès himself, who was there that struck the death-stroke more skilfully or made the bull kneel so quickly? There was absolutely no one. Gold, the price of his blood, flowed through his hands like quicksilver. What did he lack, then? And in all simplicity he tried to discover a defect in himself and found it not. The only way he could account for Militona's antipathy, or at all events her coldness, was by supposing that she loved some one else, and he pursued that some one else everywhere; the slightest cause excited his rage and jealousy, yet he, who could compel wild animals to give way before him, fought in vain the girl's icy resolve. More than once had he thought of breaking the spell by killing her. This madness of his had lasted now for more than a year, that is, since the day he had seen Militona, for his love, like all violent passions, had at once reached its fullest development; immensity cannot grow more immense.

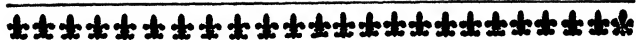


MILITONA

With a view to getting at Andrès, he had come to the conclusion that he must frequent the Salón del Prado, the del Circo and Principe theatres, the fashionable cafés, and other resorts of society people. And although he professed to despise modern dress and usually wore the majo costume, there lay on a chair near him a frock-coat, black trousers and a hat, which he had bought that morning under the arcades of the Calle Mayor, at the very moment when Andrès was making his purchase in the Rastro. The one, in order to satisfy his hatred, the other with the object of serving his love, had resorted to identical means.

Feliciana, whom Andrès, punctual as a guilty lover, did not fail to call upon at his usual hour, reproached him bitterly for the false notes and the innumerable proofs of forgetfulness he had indulged in the night before at the Marchioness de Benavidès'. There was not much use in practising a duet so carefully, of singing it day after day, if they were to make a mess of it on the great evening.

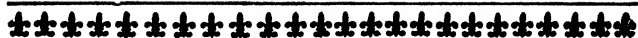
Andrès excused himself as well as he could; he avèrrèd that his own mistakes had brought out all the more strongly Feliciana's self-possessed talent; that she had never been in better voice, and that she had



MILITONA

sung in a way to make Bonconi, at the Teatro del Circo, jealous. He had no great difficulty in winning her round, and they parted very good friends.

Evening had come, and Juancho, dressed in his modern clothes, in which no one would have recognised him, was striding feverishly up and down the walks on the Prado, staring hard at every man he met, coming, going, and trying to be everywhere at once. He went into every theatre, searched with his eagle glance every box and all the orchestra-stalls and stage-boxes; he swallowed all manner of ices in the cafés, mingled with every group of politicians or poets engaged in discussing the new play, but failed to discover any one who looked like the young gentleman who had been talking with Militona on the day of the bull-fight; this for the very good reason that Andrès, who had gone to the dealer's shop to put on his costume, was at that very moment quietly taking a glass of iced lemonade in an *horchateria de chufas* (barley-water shop), situated almost opposite Militona's house, and which he had made his headquarters, with Perico for a scout. For the matter of that, Juancho would have passed him by without looking at him, for it would never have occurred to him that his rival might be wearing the

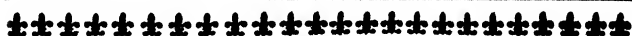


MILITONA

manolo's round jacket and sombrero de calañá. But Militona, concealed behind the corner of her window, had not been deceived for a minute ; love, it is true, is more clear-sighted than hate. She was a prey to the liveliest anxiety ; she asked herself what was the object of the young fellow in settling in that shop, and dreaded the terrible scene that could not fail to occur when he and Juancho met.

Andrès, his elbow resting on the table, was examining, with as much care as a spy on the track of a plot, every one who went into the house. There were women, men, and children, and people of every age in life, at first in great numbers, for the house contained many families, then at longer intervals. Little by little night had fallen and only a few late birds were due, yet Militona had not appeared.

Andrès was beginning to question the accuracy of the report made to him by his emissary, when the dark window was lighted up and showed that the room was inhabited. This made him certain that Militona was in her chamber, though he was no better off on that account. He wrote a few words on a piece of paper, and calling Perico, who was near, ordered him to carry the note to the beautiful manola.



MILITONA

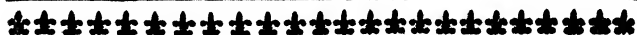
Perico, slipping in behind one of the tenants who was just going in, made his way up the dark stairs, and by groping along the walls managed to reach the topmost landing. The light that filtered between the cracks enabled him to discover the door that must be Militona's; he knocked twice in discreet fashion; the girl half-opened the wicket, took the letter, and closed the little shutter.

"I hope she can read," said Andrès to himself as he finished his iced drink and paid the Valencian master of the horchateria.

He rose and walked slowly under the window. The letter he had sent up was as follows: —

"A man who cannot forget you, and who would not if he could, would like to meet you again. But the few words you spoke to him at the bull-fight, and the fact that he does not know your circumstances, make him fear to cause you trouble if he should try to do so. If he alone were in peril that would not stop him. Put out your light and throw the answer from the window."

A few minutes later the lamp went out, the window was opened, and Militona, as she took down her jar, caused one of the pots of sweet-basil to fall, crashing to the ground not far from Don Andrès.



MILITONA

In the brown loam scattered over the pavement gleamed something white ; it was Militona's answer.

Andrès called a *sereno* (watchman) who was passing with a lantern at the end of his pike, and begged him to lower the light, by means of which he read the following words, written in a large, trembling, broken hand:—

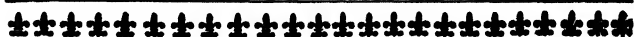
“Go away . . . I have no time to write more. To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I shall be in the church of San Isidoro. But, I beg you go ; your life is at stake.”

“Thank you, my good fellow,” said Andrès, putting a real in the *sereno*'s hand ; “you may go on your way.”

The street was now quite deserted, and Andrès was slowly walking away, when the sight of a man wrapped in a cloak under which the handle of a guitar made a sharp projection, awakened his curiosity and caused him to conceal himself in a dark corner.

The man threw the end of his cloak over his shoulder, brought his guitar in front, and began to bring from it the rhythmic strumming that serves for base and accompaniment to the airs of seguidillas and serenades.

It was plain that the noisy prelude was intended to



MILITONA

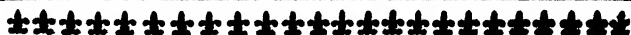
awaken the fair in whose honour the racket was being produced, and as Militona's window remained closed, the man, forced to be content with an invisible auditor, — notwithstanding the Spanish saying that no woman is ever so sound asleep but that the strumming of a guitar will bring her to her window, — began, after uttering a sonorous “Hum! hum!” to sing the following stanzas in a strong Andalusian accent: —

“Child with airs imperial,
Dove with falcon's eyes for me
Whom thou hatest, — come I shall
Underneath thy balcony !

“There, my foot upon the stone,
I shall twang my chords with grace,
Till thy window-pane hath shone
With thy lamplight and thy face.

“Let no lad with his guitar
Strum adown the bordering ways.
Mine the road to watch and bar,
Mine alone to sing thy praise.

“Let no man my courage brave.
He shall lose his ears, egad !
Who shall howl his love and rave
In a couplet good or bad.



MILITONA

- “ Restless doth my dagger lie.
Come, who 'll venture its rebuff?
Who would wear for every sigh
Blood's red flower upon his ruff?
- “ Blood grows weary of its veins ;
For it yearns to be displayed.
Night is ominous with rains,
Haste, ye cowards, back to shade !
- “ On, thou braggart, else aroint !
Well thy forearm cover thou.
On, and with my dagger's point
Let me write upon thy brow !
- “ Let them come, alone, in mass :
Firm of foot I bide my place.
For thy glory as they pass
Will I slash each paltry face.
- “ O'er the gutter, ere thy clear,
Snowy feet shall be defiled,
By the Rood ! a bridge I 'll rear
With the bones of gallants wild.
- “ I would slay, thy love to wear,
Any foe — yea, glad and proud
Satan's very self to dare,
So thy sheets became my shroud.
-



MILITONA

“ Sightless window — deafened door !
Wilt thou never heed my sounds ?
Like a wounded bull I roar,
Maddening the baying hounds.

“ Drive at least a poor nail, then,
Where my heart may hang inert —
For I want it not again,
With its madness and its hurt ! ” *

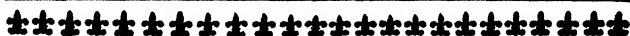
“ The devil ! that is pretty ferocious poetry,” thought Andrès. “ The stanzas cannot be called insipid, to say the least of it. Let us see if Militona, for it is in her honour that this nocturnal disturbance is taking place, appreciates these elegiacal lines composed by Hector, Don Spavento, Fracasse, or Mountain-Smiter. This must be the terrible lover she is so afraid of, and I do not wonder at it.”

Don Andrès, having put his head a little way out of the shadow in which he was concealed, was caught by a moonbeam and revealed to Juancho’s vigilant glance.

“ All right, I am caught,” said Andrès. “ Let me show a bold front.”

Juancho, throwing down his guitar, which rattled lugubriously on the pavement, dashed at Andrès, whose face was lighted up, and whom he recognised at once.

* Put into English verse by Agnes Lee.



MILITONA

“What are you doing here at this hour?” said he, in a voice that shook with anger.

“Enjoying the refined pleasure of listening to your music.”

“If you did listen you must have heard that I forbid any one coming into this street while I am singing.”

“I am of a most disobedient disposition,” replied Andrès very coolly.

“I shall make you change your disposition forthwith.”

“Indeed you will not; I am wedded to my habits.”

“Then defend yourself, or die like a dog,” howled Juancho, as he drew his navaja and rolled his cloak round his arm.

His gestures were imitated by Andrès, who fell on guard with a promptitude that proved him a skilful knife-player and that somewhat surprised the torero. Andrès had long studied knife-play under one of the best teachers in Seville, just as fashionable young men in Paris study stick-play, quarter-staff, and boxing with the foot, in accordance with the mathematical principles of Lecour and Boucher.

Juancho turned round his adversary, putting out his left arm, protected by several thicknesses of cloth, as a

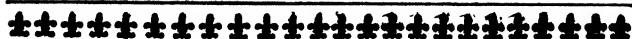


MILITONA

buckler, his right arm drawn back to give greater impetus and power to the stroke. He kept rising and sinking on his bent legs, drawing himself up like a giant or making himself small as a dwarf, but ever the point of his knife met Andrès' cloak in a ready parade. Sometimes he would suddenly draw back, or again dash fiercely forward, spring to right or left, balancing his weapon like a javelin and threatening to hurl it.

Andrès repeatedly returned such swift and well aimed ripostes to these attacks that any one but Juancho would have failed to parry them. It was really a very fine fight, and worthy of having a gallery of skilled spectators. Unfortunately, every window was shut and the street was absolutely deserted. Why, O ye academicians of San Lucar beach, of Potro de Cordoba, of the Albaycin of Gránada and the barrio of Triana, why were you not present to pass judgment on those beautiful thrusts!

The two adversaries, strong though they were, began to feel fatigued; the perspiration poured from their faces, their breath sounded like the bellows of a forge, their feet struck the ground more heavily, their springs were less elastic. Juancho had felt Andrès' knife cut through his sleeve, and his rage had been increased by



MILITONA

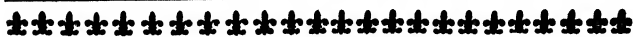
this. He resolved on a supreme effort, and, at the risk of being killed, he sprang on his foe like a tiger.

Andrès fell backwards, and in his fall burst open the ill-closed door of Militona's house, in front of which the encounter had taken place. Juancho walked calmly away, and the sereno, who was passing by the corner of the street, called out:—

“Nothing new; half-past eleven; a serene and starry sky.”



MILITONA

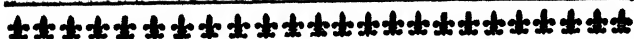


V

JUANCHO, on hearing the watchman's call, had gone off without assuring himself whether Andrès was dead, or wounded only. He thought he had killed him, so sure was he that his thrust was infallible. He felt no remorse whatever, for it had been a fair fight, and the ugly satisfaction of being rid of his rival prevailed in him over every other consideration.

It is impossible to describe the state of anxiety in which Militona was plunged while the fight lasted. She had been attracted to the window by the sound of it, and tried to call out, but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, terror clutched at her throat, and dazed, half crazy, stumbling, she got down or rather she let herself slide down the stairs, she knew not how, and reached the bottom just as Andrès was falling, and in doing so closing the unfastened leaf of the door.

Fortunately Juancho did not see the despairing and passionate way in which the girl threw herself upon



MILITONA

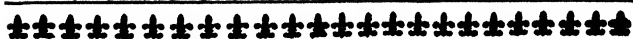
Andrès' body ; if he had done so, he would have committed two murders instead of one.

Militona put her hand to Andrès' heart and fancied she could feel it beating a little. The watchman was again passing by, repeating his monotonous refrain, and she called him to her assistance. The worthy gallego hastened up and bringing his lantern near the face of the wounded man, said : —

“Why, it is the young fellow to whom I lent my lantern to read a letter by.”

Then he bent down over him to ascertain whether he was alive or dead.

The sereno, with his strongly marked features and kindly expression ; the young girl, white as wax, her deadly pallor rendered the more conspicuous by her ebony eyebrows ; and the body of the inanimate man whose head she was supporting in her lap, formed a group worthy to tempt Rembrandt's brush. The yellow gleams of the lantern threw strange reflections upon the three faces, and formed in the centre of the scene the brilliant spot of light which the Dutch painter loved to have shining in his ruddy shadows. It might, however, have required a daintier and gentler brush than his to reproduce Militona's wondrous



MILITONA

beauty. She looked like a statue of Grief kneeling by a tomb.

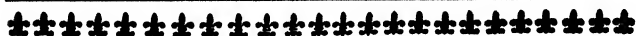
"He breathes," said the watchman, after a short examination. "Let us have a look at the wound."

With this he undid the still unconscious Andrès' jacket.

"Ah! that was a fine blow," he exclaimed in a tone of respectful astonishment. "Struck from below upwards according to rule; very neat indeed. If I am not mistaken, it was dealt by a man of Seville; I have seen so many knife-wounds that I am an expert on the subject. But the question is what we are to do with the young chap; he is not fit to be carried away, and if he were I do not know where to carry him, for he cannot tell us his address just at present."

"Let us take him up to my room," said Militona. "Since I was the first to come to his help, he belongs to me."

The sereno uttered the rallying call, summoned a fellow-watchman to his aid, and the pair of them started carefully up the steep stairs. Militona followed them, supporting the body with her little hands, and trying to make the ascent easier for the poor wounded



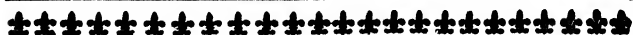
MILITONA

man, who was gently laid on the maiden's bed, with its vandyked muslin counterpane.

One of the men fetched a surgeon, and the other, while Militona was tearing up linen and making bandages and lint out of it, searched Andrès' pockets to see if he could find a card or a letter that would tell who he was. He found nothing. Even the bit of paper on which Militona had warned Andrès of the danger he was running, had fallen from his pocket during the fight, and had been blown far away by the wind. Therefore, until the wounded man should recover consciousness, there was no clue for the police to work upon.

Militona stated that she had heard the noise of a quarrel, then a man fall, but told no more; for, although she disliked Juancho, she would not accuse him of a crime of which she was herself the involuntary cause. The torero's violent manners, which terrified her, at least proved that his love for her was boundless, and even when a woman does not return such a love, she is not sorry to have inspired it.

The surgeon came at last and examined the wound, which turned out to be not very serious, the blade of the knife having slipped along a rib. Andrès, who had



MILITONA

been stunned by the force of the blow and the shock of his fall, recovered his senses as soon as the probe touched the lips of the wound. The first thing he saw on opening his eyes was Militona handing a bandage to the surgeon. Old Aldonza, whom the noise had brought in, was standing on the other side of the bed uttering condolences. The surgeon, having finished dressing the wound, promised to return the next day.

Andrès, who was beginning to grasp things, cast a glance, still rather bewildered, around him; he could not make out how he happened to be in the little white chamber, upon the chaste little couch, between an angel and an old witch. There was a break in his recollections due to his swoon, and he could not understand by what transition he had passed from the street, where he was defending himself against Juancho's navaja, into the sweet Paradise that was Militona's home.

"I told you that Juancho would do something desperate," said tia Aldonza. "You saw how angrily he glared at us. It was bound to come. A nice mess we are in now, and what it will be when he learns that you have taken this young fellow into your room . . ."



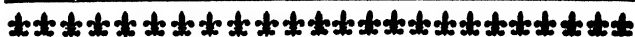
MILITONA

“I could not let him die at the door, could I?” answered Militona. “It is through me he has come to grief. Besides, Juancho will not say anything; it will be difficult enough for him to escape the punishment he deserves.”

“The patient is coming to himself,” said the old woman. “Look! his eyes are opening and the colour is coming back to his face.”

“You must not try to speak; the surgeon forbids it,” said the girl, seeing that Andrès was trying to whisper something; and she placed her hand on his lips with a nurse’s pretty air of authority.

When dawn, welcomed by the song of the quail and the cricket, shed its rosy light in the little room, it revealed a picture that would have made Juancho rave with anger. Militona, who had sat up all night by the bedside of the patient, had fallen asleep, overcome by fatigue and the excitement of the past night. Unconsciously her head, seeking a support as she dozed off, had rested on the corner of Andrès’ pillow; her lovely hair had come loose and was spread in black waves over the white sheet, while Andrès, who was not asleep, was busy curling one lock of it round his fingers. Any evil construction that might have been



MILITONA

put on the scene was, however, set at naught by the young man's wound and by the presence of tia Aldonza, who was snoring at the other end of the chamber in a way that rivalled the organ in Our Lady of Seville.

Had Juancho suspected that instead of killing his rival he had procured him the means of entering Militona's room, of being laid on that bed which he, the man with the iron heart and the steel muscles, never looked at without trembling and turning pale, and of spending the night in the chamber to which he gained difficult access during the day, and outside of which he strode up and down in the darkness, wrathful and cursing, — had he suspected this, he would have rolled on the ground in his anger and torn his breast with his nails.

Nor had Andrès, who was endeavouring to make Militona's acquaintance, ever thought of doing so in that particular way.

The young girl woke, did up her hair in great confusion, and asked the patient how he felt.

"Very well," answered he, casting on his beauteous nurse a look filled with love and gratitude.

When Andrès' servants saw that he did not come



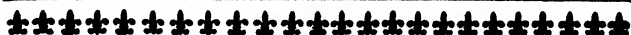
MILITONA

back, they took it for granted that he was at some jolly supper party or that he had gone into the country, and did not further trouble their heads about him.

In vain did Feliciana expect his customary visit; Andrès did not appear. The piano was the sufferer, for Feliciana, annoyed at his absence, slammed chords angrily upon it. In Spain a man who does not pay his call upon his novia at the appointed hour incurs the reproach of ingratitude and faithlessness. Not that Feliciana was deeply enamoured of Andrès; she was not naturally passionate, and besides, she considered excess in love quite indelicate; but she was accustomed to see him, and as his future wife, she looked upon him already as her own property. She went from the piano to the balcony a score of times and, in opposition to English etiquette, which forbids a woman looking out of the window, she bent over to see if Don Andrès was or was not coming.

“I suppose I shall meet him at the Prado this evening,” said she to herself by way of consolation, “and when I do I will scold him in proper fashion.”

Unquestionably the Prado, at seven o'clock on a summer evening, is one of the finest promenades in the world; not because cooler shades and a more pictu-



MILITONA

resque site may not be found elsewhere, but because nowhere is there so much animation, or such a joyous, bustling company.

The Prado extends from the Puerta de Recoletos to the Puerta Atocha, but it is not much frequented save in the portion comprised between the Calle d'Alcala and the Calle San Jerónimo. This part is called the Salón, which is not a very rustic name for a promenade. Rows of short trees, polled in order to make the foliage spread, cast miserly shade upon the people. The drive reserved for carriages is bordered with chairs, like the Boulevard de Gand (Boulevard des Italiens), and with candelabra like those in the Place de la Concorde, these having taken the place of the pretty lamp-posts with volutes regularly curling, from which, until quite lately, hung the lamps. On this drive parade carriages brought from London and Brussels, tilburys, calashes, landaus, with coats of arms on the panels, and occasionally an old Spanish coach drawn by four lusty mules with shining coats.

The riders bend from their English trotters or make their handsome Andalusian horses prance and paw. These horses have their manes plaited with red ribbons, they bend their necks in swanlike fashion, and they



MILITONA

move with as much undulating grace as the hips of an Arab dancer. From time to time there gallops past a superb Cordova barb, black as ebony, and worthy of eating pearl barley from an alabaster manger in a Caliph's stables, or else some marvellous beauty, a Murillo Madonna that has stepped from her frame, drives by enthroned in her carriage with a Beaudrand hat for a halo.

In the Salón, properly so called, swarms an ever changing crowd, a living stream, with contrary currents, eddies, and whirlpools, flowing along between the quays of seated people.

The white or black lace mantillas frame in their light folds the heavenliest faces it is possible to see. It is rare to see an ugly woman. On the Prado, plain women are merely pretty; fans open and shut with swift rattling, and the *agurs* (good-day), exchanged in passing, are accompanied by gracious smiles or a wave of the hand. It is quite like the foyer at the opera in carnival time; like a fancy dress ball.

On the other side, in the walks that run past the Artillery Park and the Museum of Painting, stroll a few misanthropical smokers who prefer the coolness and silence of evening to heat and the bustle of the crowd.



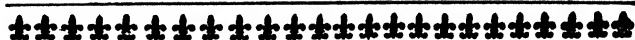
MILITONA

Feliciana, who was driving in an open carriage with her father, Don Geronimo, looked, but in vain, for her lover among the young riders. He did not, according to his habit, come to prance alongside her carriage. Also lookers-on were surprised to see the equipage of Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios drive four times up and down without its usual escort.

Presently Feliciana, not seeing Andrès in the equestrian state, supposed that he might be strolling on foot in the Salón, and told her father she desired to walk a little; but after she had taken three or four turns in the side walk and the Salón, she came to the conclusion that Andrès was not there at all.

A young Englishman, who had brought letters of introduction to Don Geronimo, came up to pay his respects to her, and began one of those laboured conversations in languages they do not know, with the strangest of gurglings and intonations, which the dwellers in the British Isles alone have perseverance enough to carry on.

Feliciana, who could read "The Vicar of Wakefield" with fair ease, came to the rescue of the young islander with charming kindness, and smiled in the sweetest way upon his horrible lingo. At the Teatro



MILITONA

del Circo, to which they afterwards repaired, she explained the ballet to him and told him the names of the people in the boxes. Yet Andrès did not turn up.

When they had returned home, Feliciana said to her father :

“ Andrès has not been here to-day.”

“ Why, that is true,” returned Geronimo. “ I shall send to his house to inquire. He must be ill.”

Half an hour later the servant returned and said:—

“ Don Andrès de Salcedo has not been home since yesterday.”



MILITONA



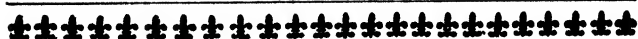
VI

THE next day passed without news of Andrès. Inquiries were made at the houses of every one of his friends, but no one had seen him for two days.

This was strange. It was suggested that he had been called away unexpectedly on important business, but his servants, on being questioned by Don Geronimo, stated that their master had gone out, two days before, at six in the evening, after having dined as usual, without having made any preparations or said anything that would point to his having gone on a trip. He was dressed in a black frock-coat, a yellow waistcoat of English piqué, and white trousers, as if on his way to the Prado.

Don Geronimo, much troubled, ordered an examination of Andrès' room, with the object of ascertaining whether he had not left on some piece of furniture a note explaining his disappearance. But the only paper found was cigarette paper.

How could this extraordinary absence of his be accounted for?



MILITONA

By suicide ?

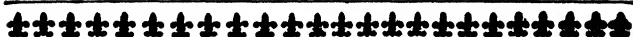
But Andrès was neither crossed in love nor troubled about money, since he was ere long to marry the girl of his heart, and had an income of a hundred thousand reals derived from safe investments. Besides, it is impossible for a man to drown himself in the Manzanarès in the month of June, unless he deliberately digs a well in it.

By an ambush ?

Andrès had no enemies, at least he was not known to have any. His self-command and peaceful habits put a duel out of the question ; just as much as a row in which he might have been killed. Then, had this happened the fact would have become known, and Andrès would have been brought back home, either alive or dead.

It was plain that there was here a mystery which the police alone could solve. And Geronimo, simple-minded like all honest people, believed the police to be omniscient and infallible, and therefore had recourse to it.

The police, in the person of the alcalde of the quarter, put its spectacles on its nose, looked through its books, and found nothing in them, since the even-



MILITONA

ing when Andrès had disappeared, that could be connected with him. The night had been a very quiet one in the most noble and most heroic city of Madrid; bar a few burglaries, rows in low resorts, and some fights between drunken men in pot-houses, everything had been lovely.

“There was, however, an attempt at murder in the neighbourhood of the Plaza de Lavapiès,” said the worthy magistrate before he closed his register.

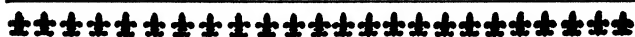
“Oh! sir,” quoth Don Geronimo, taking fright, “can you tell me any particulars?”

“How was Don Andrès de Salcedo dressed the last time he left his house?” asked the magistrate, with a very wise look.

“He had on a black frock-coat,” replied Geronimo, with much anxiety.

“Are you prepared to swear that it was black, really black,” went on the alcalde, “and not negrohead, for instance, or bronze-green, or dark-gray or maroon? The shade is very important.”

“It was black, I am sure of it; I could swear it was black. Yes, before God and men; black was the colour of my future son-in-law’s frock-coat. It was a stylish colour, as my daughter Feliciana calls it.”



MILITONA

“Your replies show you to be a well educated man,” put in the magistrate. “So you are sure the frock-coat was black?”

“Yes, worthy sir; it was black, I am convinced of it, and nothing will make me swerve from that.”

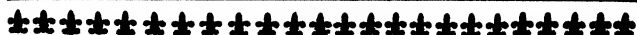
“The victim in this case wore a short jacket, of the kind called Marseillaise, and of a tobacco colour. Of course at night a black frock-coat might be taken for a brown jacket,” said the magistrate to himself, as if turning the matter over in his mind. “Don Geronimo, can you manage to recollect the kind of waistcoat Don Andrès wore on that evening?”

“A vest of yellow English piqué.”

“The wounded man had on a blue vest with filigree buttons. Blue and yellow are not much alike; there is a discrepancy here. What trousers had he on, sir?”

“White trousers, sir, — of duck, with straps, fitting close to the boot. So his valet, who assisted him to dress on that fatal day, tells me.”

“The report states that the trousers are gray and full, and the shoes of white calf. This is not the same thing. This costume is that of a majo, of a dandy of the lower classes, who got this nasty blow in the course



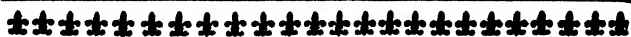
MILITONA

of a row over a short-skirted damsel. With the best will in the world I cannot recognise Don Andrès de Salcedo in this person. Here is the description given of the wounded man, which was taken down very carefully by the sereno: ‘Oval face, round chin, ordinary forehead, medium nose, no distinguishing marks.’ Do you recognise Don Andrès in this portrait?”

“Not in the least,” answered Don Geronimo earnestly. “But how are we going to find him?”

“Do not be disturbed about that; the police watches over all our citizens; it sees everything, hears everything, and is everywhere. Nothing escapes it. Argus had but a hundred eyes; the police has a thousand, that cannot be induced to close by being played to on the flute. We shall find Don Andrès de Salcedo, even if he were in the bottomless pit. I shall put two inspectors on his track, the cleverest detectives that ever lived, Argamasilla and Covachuelo, and within twenty-four hours we shall know what has happened.”

Don Geronimo thanked the alcalde, bowed, and returned home quite comforted. He related the conversation he had had with the police to his daughter, who did not for one moment suspect that the manolo



MILITONA

who had been wounded in the Calle del Povar was the young man she was engaged to marry.

Feliciana mourned the loss of her betrothed with all the reserve proper in a well brought-up young lady, for it would be indelicate in a young person to seem to regret a man too much. From time to time she put to her eyes a lace-bordered handkerchief, to wipe away a tear she brought up with difficulty to the corner of her eye. The unused duets lay prone and melancholy upon the piano, itself closed: a sign of profound mental disturbance in Feliciana's case. Don Geronimo, on his part, was impatiently awaiting the expiration of the twenty-four hours in order to read the triumphant report to be made by Argamasilla and Covachuelo.

The pair of clever detectives first went to Andrès' residence and managed to pump the servants very neatly about their master's habits. They learned that Andrès drank chocolate in the morning, had a siesta at noon, dressed at about three o'clock, went to see Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios, dined at six, and came home to bed about midnight, after the theatre or supper. This caused the detectives to meditate deeply. They learned also that on leaving his house Andrès had gone



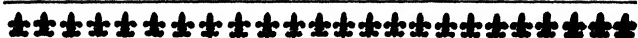
MILITONA

down the Calle d'Alcala as far as the Calle Ancha de Peligros, which precious piece of information was imparted to them by an Asturian porter who was in the habit of standing near the door.

They proceeded to the Calle de Peligros, and managed to ascertain that Andrès had gone that way, two evenings before, at a few minutes after six. There was good reason to believe that he had continued on his way through the Calle de la Cruz.

Having obtained this important result, and worn out by the violent mental exertion it involved, they entered a hermitage — that is the name given to wine-shops in Madrid — and had a game of cards, with a bottle of Manzanilla wine, which carried them on to the next morning.

After a short sleep they resumed their investigations, and succeeded in tracing Andrès to the neighbourhood of the Rastro, but there they lost track of him, no one being able to give them any information concerning a young gentleman in a black frock-coat, yellow piqué vest, and white trousers. He had vanished completely. Many had seen him go, none had seen him return. The detectives were fairly puzzled. Andrès could not possibly have been kidnapped in broad daylight in

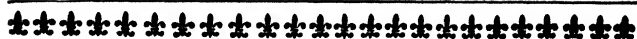


MILITONA

one of the most densely populated quarters of Madrid, yet, unless it was supposed that a trap-door had opened under him, there was no way of explaining his disappearance.

The pair wandered a long time about the Rastro, questioned a number of dealers, but failed to elicit any further information. They even made inquiries in the very shop where Andrès had changed his dress, but it happened to be the wife who received them, while it was the husband who had sold the clothes. Consequently she was unable to tell them anything, and besides, did not understand the guarded questions they put to her. Indeed, she took them for thieves, on account of their appearance, and turned them out, in a pretty bad temper, although they were the very reverse of what she thought, and then looked round to see whether they had taken anything.

Such was the result of their day's work. Don Geronimo went back to the police-office, and was gravely told that they were on the track of the guilty parties, but that too much haste might compromise matters. The worthy gentleman, greatly admiring, reported the reply of the police to Feliciano, who raised her eyes to heaven, uttered a sigh and said, "Poor



MILITONA

Andrès! ” — an expression she deemed not over strong under the circumstances.

A curious incident complicated the mysterious affair. A young lad some fifteen years of age, had left at Andrès' house a fairly large parcel, and had withdrawn hastily after saying, “To be given to Don de Salcedo.” These words, apparently so simple, struck every one as infernally ironical when the parcel was opened. It contained — can the reader guess? — the black frock-coat, the yellow piqué vest, the white trousers, and the neat patent-leather boots with red morocco tops belonging to the unfortunate Andrès. Whoever had sent them had carried sarcasm to the point of rolling his Paris gloves carefully one within the other.

In presence of this strange fact, unexampled in the annals of crime, Argamasilla and Covachuelo were struck dumb with amazement. Then the one raised his hands to heaven, and the other let his hang limp down his sides, in an attitude expressive of discouragement; the former said, *O tempora!* and the latter, *O mores!*

That these two alguazils should speak Latin need surprise no one. Argamasilla had studied for the

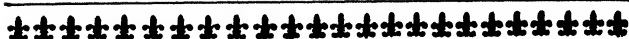


MILITONA

church, and Covachuelo for the bar, but both had met with misfortunes. Which of us has not come to grief at some time or other?

The returning of the clothes of the victim, neatly done up and corded, to his residence was unquestionably a refinement of uncommon perversity. This mingling of raillery and crime was bound to furnish the attorney-general with a fine text for his speech.

Meanwhile the examination of the clothing made by the detectives merely perplexed them still more. The cloth of the coat was absolutely intact; there was no trace of any round or triangular hole, betokening the passage of a knife-blade or of a bullet. It might be the victim had been choked to death. But in that case a struggle must have taken place, and the vest and the trousers would not have been in such good condition; they would certainly have been rumpled, out of shape, torn; for it could not be supposed that Andrès de Salcedo had first carefully undressed himself before the crime was committed, and then yielded himself up stark naked to the daggers of the assassins in order to save his clothes. Such a course would have been unworthy of him. It was really enough to make



MILITONA

cleverer men than Argamasilla and Covachuelo give up in despair.

Covachuelo, who was the better reasoner of the pair, after having pressed his brow with his hands for a quarter of an hour, came to the following admirable conclusion : —

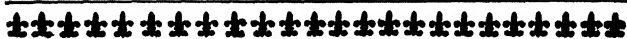
“ If Don Andrès de Salcedo is not dead, he must be alive, for men are one or the other ; I am not aware of the existence of an intermediate state.”

Argamasilla nodded in acquiescence.

“ Now, if he is alive, as I am convinced he is, he cannot be going about without any clothes on, *more ferarum*. He carried no parcel when he left his house, and as we have his garments here, he must necessarily have purchased others ; for it is not to be supposed that, in our advanced state of civilisation, a man should be content to go about in the costume worn by Adam.”

Argamasilla’s eyes were starting from his head, so intent was he on following the deductions of his friend Covachuelo.

“ I do not believe Don Andrès had caused to be prepared beforehand the clothes he put on later in some house in the quarter where we lost track of him. I am



MILITONA

of opinion that he purchased a suit from some dealer and then sent back his own garments."

"You are a genius, a god," said Argamasilla, pressing Covachuelo to his breast. "Allow me to embrace you. From this day forward I am no longer your friend, I am your devoted follower, your dog, your slave. Do with me as you will, O great man, I follow you wherever you go. Ah! if the government were only just to you, you would be political chief in the greatest cities in the kingdom, instead of a mere police officer. But governments are never just."

"We shall proceed to investigate every second-hand dealer's shop, as well as every shop in the city where clothes are sold ready-made. We shall examine their sales books, and in that way we shall learn the new description of Don de Salcedo. If the porter had only had the sense to have the muchacho who brought the parcel arrested, or to arrest him himself, we should have learned who had sent him and whence he came. But people who are not in our business never think of anything; besides, this point could not have been foreseen. Come, let us start, Argamasilla; you shall go the round of the tailors in the Calle Mayor, and I shall question the second-hand dealers in the Rastro."



MILITONA

A few hours later the two friends reported to the alcalde.

Argamasilla detailed, fully and minutely, the result of his investigations. A person dressed in a majo costume, and apparently labouring under great excitement, had purchased and paid for, without haggling over the price, — a mark of deep mental agitation, — a black frock-coat and a pair of black trousers from one of the leading merchant tailors in the arcades of the Calle Mayor.

Covachuelo stated that a dealer on the Rastro had sold a manolo's jacket, vest, and sash to a person wearing a black frock-coat and white trousers, who was most probably Don Andrès de Salcedo himself.

Both these men had changed their clothes in the back-shop and had gone out wearing their new garments, which, in view of the rank in life to which they respectively appeared to belong, were unquestionably disguises. Now for what purpose, on the same day, and almost at the same hour, had a gentleman assumed the dress of a majo, and a majo that of a gentleman? This was a point which the meaner intelligence of subalterns such as Covachuelo and Argamasilla could not solve, but which the clear-sighted



MILITONA

magistrate to whom they had the honour to report would infallibly see the bearing of. For their part, with all due reservation, they had come to the conclusion that the mysterious disappearance, the singular coincidence in the assumption of disguises, the clothes sent back as if by way of challenge, all these inexplicable things, in a word, must be connected with some wide-spread conspiracy, the object of which was to set Espartero or the Count de Montemolin on the throne. No doubt the guilty parties had started, wearing their borrowed dresses, to join a Carlist group or a party of guerillas endeavouring to reorganise in Aragon or Catalonia. Spain was dancing on a volcano, but if the authorities would only pay them for the job, they, Argamasilla and Covachuelo, would undertake to extinguish the volcano, to prevent the guilty parties from joining their accomplices, and to hand in, within a week, the list of the names of the conspirators and the plans of the conspiracy.

The alcalde listened to this remarkable report with all due attention, and said to the two detectives : —

“ Have you any information concerning the actions of these two individuals after they had each disguised themselves ? ”



MILITONA

“The majo, wearing the dress of a gentleman, went for a walk in the Prado, then to the Teatro del Circo, and ate an ice at the Café de la Bourse.”

“The gentleman, dressed as a majo, walked several times round the Plaza de Lavapiès and through the adjacent streets, strolling along and looking at the manolas at their windows. Then he drank an iced lemonade in an *borchateria de chufas*,” said Covachuelo.

“They both acted in accordance with the dress they wore,” said the alcalde. “They have given proof of deep dissimulation and hellish skill. The one was trying to gain popularity and to sound the feelings of the lower classes; the other was seeking to assure the higher that they had the sympathy and the co-operation of the lower. But we are keeping our eyes on them. We shall catch you red-handed, gentlemen and conspirators, whether you be Carlists or Ayacuchos, Progressists or Reactionaries. Ha! ha! Argus had a hundred eyes, but the police has a thousand, and these are never closed in sleep.”

This was the worthy man’s pet phrase, his hobby, his Lillibullero. He was right in thinking that when he had no ideas it took the place of them most satisfactorily.



MILITONA

“ You, Argamasilla, and you, Covachuelo, shall have your reward in money. But have you ascertained what became of your two criminals — for there is no doubt of their criminality — after they had performed the manœuvres required of them in the execution of their evil projects? ”

“ We have not, sir ; for it was already dark, and as we could get only ocular and vague testimony concerning their apparent and past operations, we lost track of them after night-fall.”

“ The devil you did ! That is a pity,” said the alcalde.

“ But we shall find them again,” shouted the two friends enthusiastically.

In the course of the day Don Geronimo dropped in to learn if there was any news.

The magistrate received him rather coldly, and on Don Geronimo apologising and begging his pardon for having been so importunate, he said to him : —

“ You ought not to appear to take so much interest in Don Andrès de Salcedo. He is implicated in a vast conspiracy, the threads of which we are on the point of getting hold of.”

“ Andrès conspiring ! ” exclaimed Don Geronimo.
“ Never ! ”



MILITONA

“He is conspiring, I tell you,” replied the police magistrate, peremptorily.

“So gentle, so quiet, so bright, so inoffensive a young fellow?”

“He feigned to be inoffensive just as Brutus feigned to be mad. It was his way of concealing his game and drawing attention away from himself. We are up to all those tricks, we old hands. The best thing that can happen to him is not to turn up again. You can wish him nothing better.”

Poor Geronimo withdrew in great confusion, and much ashamed of his lack of perspicacity. He had dandled Andrès on his knee, he had known him since childhood, yet he had never suspected that he had taken to his bosom so dangerous a conspirator. He admired and was terrified at the dreadful sagacity of the police, which had so quickly penetrated a secret that he had never suspected, though he had seen the criminal daily and been so vastly mistaken in him that he had actually intended to make him his son-in-law.

Feliciana’s amazement was boundless when she learned that she had been courted so assiduously by the leader of a vast Carlist plot. Don Andrès must indeed have been endowed with great strength of mind never

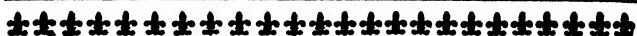


MILITONA

to have allowed his political preoccupations to show on the surface, and meanwhile to go on rehearsing so phlegmatically duets by Bellini ! After that, who could trust to airs of indifference, to quiet looks, serene eyes, and smiling lips ? Who could have suspected that Andrès, who never got excited save over bull-fights, and who appeared to have no other opinions than a preference for Sevilla to Rodrigues, and Chiclanero to Arjona, concealed such vast projects under apparent frivolity ?

The two detectives resumed their investigations, and learned that the young man who had been wounded and taken into Militona's room was the same who had bought clothes in the Rastro. The report of the watchman and of the second-hand dealer agreed in every particular. The brown jacket, the blue vest, the red sash, — there could be no mistake.

This fact somewhat upset the hopes of Argamasilla and Covachuelo concerning the conspiracy. They would have preferred that Andrès should have disappeared. The case seemed to be resolving itself into a mere love affair, an innocent quarrel between rivals, a murder, purely and simply ; in fact into the most insignificant of matters. The neighbours had heard the serenade, and the whole thing was now plain.



MILITONA

Said Covachuelo with a sigh : —

“I am always unlucky.”

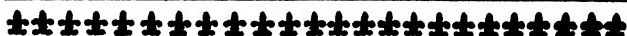
And Argamasilla returned in tearful tones : —

“I was born under an unlucky star.”

Poor beggars ! They had nosed out a conspiracy and all they had come upon was a wretched little row ending only in serious wounding ! It was pitiable indeed.

Let us return to Juancho, whom I have neglected since his knife duel with Andrès. An hour afterwards he had softly made his way back to the scene of the combat, and had been greatly surprised not to find the body in the spot where, he felt certain, he had seen it fall. Could his adversary have picked himself up and dragged himself farther away in his agony ? Or had the watch gathered him in ? He had no means of finding out. Should he remain in Madrid or take to flight ? Flight would be a confession of guilt ; and besides, his jealous nature could not bear the thought of leaving Militona free to act as she pleased. The night had been dark, the street had been empty, no one had seen him. Who could possibly accuse him ?

Nevertheless the fight had lasted long enough to allow his foe to recognise him, for toreros, like actors,



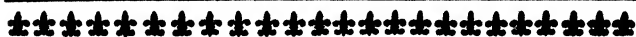
MILITONA

have faces well known to the public, and if his rival had not been killed on the spot, as was not unlikely, he might have denounced him. Juancho, who was not in good odour with the police on account of his readiness to use his knife, ran the risk, if he were caught, of spending a few seasons in the Spanish possessions in Africa, at Ceuta or Melilla.

He therefore returned home, brought out his Cordova horse, threw a striped blanket on its back, and started off at a gallop.

Had a painter seen that athletic horseman passing through the streets, sitting firmly on the big black horse, with its wild mane and flying tail, striking showers of sparks from the uneven pavement, and dashing past the whitish walls on which his shadow found it difficult to keep up with him, he would have painted a strikingly effective figure; for the noisy flight through the silent city, the rush through the peaceful night, were most dramatic — but all painters were in bed just then.

Juancho soon reached the Caravanchel road, passed the Segovia bridge, and tore at full speed through the dark, lonely country. He had already gone some twelve miles when the thought of Militona recurred to him with such violence that he was unable to proceed



MILITONA

farther. He took it into his head that he had not struck his blow straight enough, and that he had perhaps inflicted but a slight wound upon his foe. He could see him cured, kneeling before the smiling Militona. Cold sweat broke out over his forehead; his teeth were clenched so hard that he could not force them apart; he unconsciously pressed his knees so fiercely into his horse that the noble animal, feeling its ribs compressed, could not breathe and stopped short. Juancho felt as if red-hot needles were being driven into his heart.

He swung his horse round and stormed back to the city. When he reached it the animal was covered with lather. Three o'clock in the morning had just struck. Juancho made his way at top speed to the Calle del Povar. Militona's lamp was still shining, like a chaste, quivering star, at the corner of the old wall. The torero tried to burst in the door leading into the alley-way, but in spite of his tremendous strength he could not manage it. Militona had taken care to put up the iron bars on the inside. Juancho returned to his lodgings broken down, pitifully wretched, and a prey to the most horrible uncertainty, for he had seen two shadows projected upon Militona's

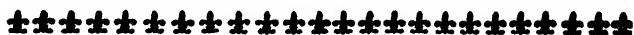


MILITONA

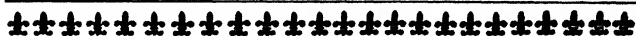
curtain. Could he possibly have killed the wrong man?

As soon as it was broad daylight again, the torero, muffled in his cloak, and his hat pulled down over his eyes, came back to the Calle del Povar to listen to the different versions of the events that had occurred during the night. He learned that the young man was not dead, but that it had been found impossible to carry him away, and that he had therefore been taken into Militona's room, for which charitable action the girl was being praised by all the gossips of the place. In spite of his strength, he felt his knees giving way, and was compelled to lean against the wall. His rival was in Militona's room! On her bed! No more horrible torture could have befallen him in the ninth circle of Hell.

He came to a decisive resolution, entered the house, and began to ascend the stairs with a heavy step that sounded more sinister than that of the Commander's statue.



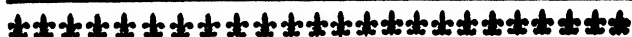
MILITONA



VII

ON reaching the first-floor landing, Juancho, half crazed and staggering, stopped and remained for a moment as if petrified; he was afraid of himself and the horrors that were about to take place. Thoughts innumerable crowded into his brain. Should he be satisfied with trampling on his rival and depriving him of what little of his abhorred breath was left? Should he kill Militona or set fire to the house? He was tossed about on a sea of dreadful, insensate, contradictory desires. He did have a gleam of common-sense, and was on the point of returning down stairs; he even turned half round, but jealousy drove anew its poisoned thorn into his heart, and he started afresh up the steep stairs.

It would have been difficult to come upon a more vigorously built man than Juancho; his neck, round as a pillar and strong as a tower, connected his massive head and his powerful shoulders; his invincible arms were a network of muscles of steel; his breast surpassed the marble pectorals of the gladiators of antiquity; with



MILITONA

one hand he could pull out a bull's horn, yet the intensity of his mental suffering neutralised his physical strength. His temples were bathed in sweat, his limbs were giving way under him, the blood was rushing to his brain, and flames of fire swept past his eyes. He was several times compelled to cling to the balustrade to save himself from falling and rolling like a helpless body down the stairs, so fierce was the pain he experienced.

And as he climbed step after step, he repeated, gnashing his teeth like a wild beast : —

“In her room ! In her room !”

And mechanically he opened and shut the long Albacete knife he had drawn from his belt.

Within the room silence reigned, and all Juancho heard was the surging of the blood in his veins and the dull beating of his own heart.

What was going on in that silent chamber, behind the feeble rampart of the door that separated him from his foe ? No doubt Militona was bending with tender and sympathetic complacency over the couch of the wounded man, watching over his sleep and soothing his suffering.

“ Oh ! ” said Juancho to himself, “ had I but known



MILITONA

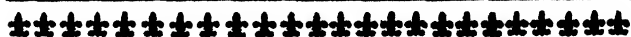
that all that was needed to win your love was a knife-thrust in the chest, I should have stabbed myself, and not him. In that accursed fight I should have purposely given him an opening, so that I might fall dying in front of your door. But you would have let me writhe in agony upon the pavement without offering to help me, for I am no pretty gentleman with white kids and well-fitting frock-coat."

And his fury blazing up at the thought, he knocked fiercely at the door.

Andrès started on his bed of pain; Militona, who was seated by him, rose straight up and pale, as if shot up by a spring; tia Aldonza turned green, made the sign of the cross, and kissed her thumb.

The knock was so fierce, short, commanding that it was impossible not to open. If a second like unto the first followed, the door would be burst in, for it was the knock of marble guests, of spectres that will not away, of all the fateful beings that come to end crises: Vengeance armed with her dagger, Justice with her sword.

Tia Aldonza opened the wicket with a trembling hand, and through the square hole saw Juancho's face. The mask of Medusa, bloodless amid its green serpent



MILITONA

hair, would not have produced a more tremendous effect upon the poor old woman. She tried to call out, but no sound came from her dried-up throat. She remained with fingers outspread, staring eyes, and her mouth with the cry petrified in it, as if she had been turned to stone.

It is true that the torero's face, as it showed in the setting of the wicket, was anything but reassuring. His eyes were bloodshot, his features livid, his bloodless cheeks showed like white spots on his pallid visage, his dilated nostrils worked like those of a wild beast scenting its prey, his teeth were biting into his lip swollen by the wounds thus inflicted. Jealousy, fury, and vengeance were contending on his distorted countenance.

"Our Lady of Almudela," murmured the old woman, "if you save us from this peril I will say a novena unto you and offer you a scalloped candle with velvet holder!"

Brave as Andrès was, he felt the uncomfortable sensation experienced by the bravest men when they are confronted by a peril against which they are defenceless. He instinctively extended his hand to grasp a weapon.

Juancho seeing that the door was not being opened



MILITONA

to him, leaned against it and shoved hard ; the planks creaked and the plastering broke away from the hinges and the lock.

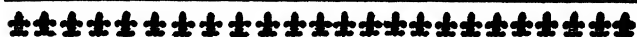
Militona, placing herself in front of Andrès, said in a firm and calm voice to the old woman, who was paralysed by fear : —

“ Open the door, Aldonza ; I will it.”

Aldonza drew the bolt and flattening herself against the wall, pulled the door upon herself by way of protection, as did the belluarii when letting a tiger into the circus, or the attendants at the toril when setting free a Gaviria or Colmenar bull.

Juancho, who had anticipated more resistance, entered slowly, somewhat disconcerted at not meeting with obstacles. But one glance cast at Andrès lying on Militona's bed, made his wrath blaze out again. He caught hold of the door, to which old Aldonza, persuaded her last hour had come, was clinging with all her strength, and shut it in spite of the poor woman's efforts. Then he leaned against it and crossed his arms on his breast.

“ God in Heaven ! ” stammered the old woman, her teeth chattering, “ he will murder us all. I had better go to the window and call for help.”



MILITONA

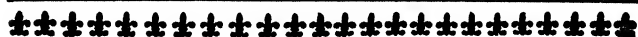
She started to do so, but Juancho, guessing her intention, caught hold of her dress, and roughly threw her back against the wall, tearing her garment in doing so.

“Do not attempt to call out, old beldame, or I shall wring your neck like a fowl’s and send your old soul back to the devil! Do not step between me and the object of my anger, or I shall crush you out of the way.”

As he spoke these words he pointed to Andrès, who, pale and weak, was trying to raise his head from the pillow.

The situation was frightful, for no noise had occurred to alarm the neighbours. Besides, such was the terror inspired by Juancho that these same neighbours would have shut themselves up in their own rooms rather than interfere. It would have taken a great deal of time to fetch the police or the soldiers, and even to do so would have necessitated summoning some one outside, since there was no means of leaving the chamber of doom.

Thus poor Andrès, already wounded with a knife-thrust, weakened by loss of blood, unarmed, incapable of using a weapon had he possessed one,



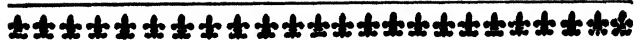
MILITONA

incommoded by bandages and blankets, and deprived of any human means of succour, lay at the mercy of a brute drunk with jealousy and rage. And all this was the result of his having looked at a pretty manola at the bull-fight. Just at this moment it may be assumed that he regretted the piano, the afternoon tea, and the prosaic manners of civilisation. He did cast, however, a suppliant glance at Militona, as if to beg her not to attempt a useless struggle; but she was so radiantly beautiful, pale as she was with terror, that he was not sorry to have made her acquaintance even at such a price.

She stood, one hand resting on the bed, as if to defend Andrès, the other pointing commandingly to the door.

“What brings you here, murderer?” said she to Juancho in a ringing voice. “You are looking for a lover in a room where there is only a wounded man. Go at once. I wonder you do not dread the wound will bleed afresh in your presence. Are you not satisfied with slaying? Must you be an *assassin*?”

The girl laid such stress upon that word, and followed it up with so searching a look, that Juancho



MILITONA

was disconcerted, reddened, turned pale, and the expression of his features became anxious instead of ferocious as it had been. After a moment of silence, he said in a broken voice: —

“Swear to me by the relics of Monte-Sagrado and the image of Our Lady del Pilar, swear by your father, who was a hero, by your mother, who was a saint, that you do not love that fellow, and I go.”

Andrès anxiously awaited Militona’s answer.

But no answer came.

Only her long eyelashes fell upon her cheeks, that flushed slightly.

Although Militona’s silence might prove his death sentence, Andrès, who had awaited her reply with anxiety, felt his heart fill with inexpressible satisfaction.

“If you will not swear,” went on Juancho, “affirm it, simply. I shall believe you; you have never deceived. But you remain silent. I must kill him, then. You love him!” And he advanced towards the bed, knife in hand.

“Well, yes, I do love him!” cried the girl, her eyes blazing and her voice trembling with sublime wrath. “If he must die because of me, let him at least know that he is beloved. Let him carry into the tomb that



MILITONA

declaration, which shall be his recompense and your torture ! ”

With one spring Juancho was upon Militona and grasped her arm.

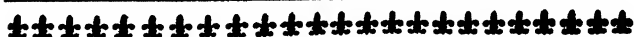
“ Do not repeat what you have just said, or I will not answer for what I may do, and I shall throw you, with my navaja in your heart, upon the corpse of your fond one.”

“ What care I ? ” said the brave girl. “ Do you suppose I should live if he died ? ”

Andrès, making a tremendous effort, tried to sit up. He attempted to call out, but only a bloody foam rose to his lips ; his wound had reopened, and he fell back swooning on his pillow.

“ If you do not go out of this,” said Militona, on seeing the state Andrès was in, “ I shall believe you vile, infamous, and a coward. I shall believe that you could have saved Dominguez, when the bull knelt down on his chest, and that you did not do it because you were basely jealous.”

“ Militona ! Militona ! you have the right to hate me, though never was a woman so loved by a man as I love you, but you have no right to despise me. No one could have saved Dominguez from his fate.”



MILITONA

"If you do not want me to look upon you as a murderer, leave the room at once."

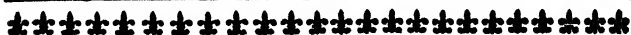
"Very well, I will wait until he is cured," answered Juancho, in a sombre tone. "Take the best care of him, and remember that I have sworn that as long as I live, you shall not belong to any other man."

While this discussion had been going on, the old woman had slipped out to alarm the neighbourhood and to fetch help.

Five or six men threw themselves on Juancho, who left the room with a cluster of muchachos hanging on to him. He shook them off and threw them against the wall just as a bull does with dogs, without one of them having a chance to bite and stop him. Then he quietly walked off into the maze of streets that surround the Plaza de Lavapiès.

The scene aggravated Andrès' condition. A violent fever came on, and he was delirious the whole day, the whole night, and the following day. Militona nursed him with the most tender and loving solicitude.

Meanwhile Argamasilla and Covachuelo, as I have informed my readers, had managed, by dint of inquiries, to ascertain that the manolo who had been wounded in the Calle del Povar, was none other than



MILITONA

Don Andrès de Salcedo, and the alcalde of the quarter had written to Don Geronimo that the young gentleman in whom he was interested had been found in the home of a Lavapiès manola, who had picked him up half-dead at her door, wearing, no one knew why, a majo's dress.

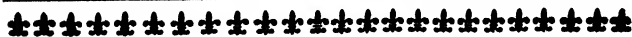
Felicianà, on receiving this news, asked herself whether an engaged young lady might visit her dangerously wounded sweetheart if she were accompanied by her father or some respectable relative. She feared that it would be shocking for a well brought-up young lady to see a man in bed, and though illness made the case different, nevertheless it might well be that a modest girl should not permit herself to look upon such a sight. On the other hand, suppose Andrès were to think she had abandoned him, and died of grief in consequence? It would be sad indeed.

"Father," said Felicianà, "we ought to go and see poor Andrès."

"Willingly, my girl," replied the old gentleman; "I was about to suggest that we should do so."



MILITONA

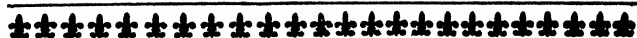


VIII

THANKS to his excellent constitution and to Militona's careful nursing, Andrès soon was on the way to restored health. He was able to speak and to sit up in bed. Then the thought of the situation he was in occurred to him; it was a somewhat embarrassing one.

He supposed, of course, that his disappearance must have caused Feliciano, Don Geronimo, and his other friends an amount of anxiety which he blamed himself for not relieving, but he could not bring himself to let his betrothed know that he was laid up in the room of a pretty girl, on whose account he had managed to get stabbed. It was a painful avowal to make, yet make it he must.

The business had assumed proportions infinitely greater than he had intended, for all he had thought of at first was having a passing intrigue with a girl of no consequence in particular. But Militona's courage and devotion had altogether altered the case. What would she say when she heard that Andrès



MILITONA

was engaged? The thought of Felician's anger touched the young patient far less than the thought of Militona's grief. To Felician the affair would be a piece of impropriety; to Militona it meant despair. Was this how he was to reward her for her noble confession of love in face of imminent danger? Was he not bound to protect the girl henceforth against Juancho's fury? — for the man might try again and renew his violence.

Andr  turned all these and many other points over in his mind, and while he reflected he kept looking at Militona, who was at work, seated by the window; for, once the excitement of the first moments had subsided, she had resumed her laborious life.

A warm, pure light enveloped her caressingly, and shimmered in bluish gleams upon the bandeaux of her magnificent hair, coiled in a tress upon the back of her head, a carnation, fastened in near the temple, flashing on its ebon hue like a red spark. She looked most attractive thus seen, and a bit of blue sky, against which showed the foliage of the pot of sweet-basil, alone since its companion had been cast into the street on the night of the note, formed a background for her lovely face.



MILITONA

The quail and the cricket sang alternately, and a light breeze, scented by the odorous plant, wafted a faint, sweet aroma into the room.

Andrès felt the charm of the room itself, with its whitewashed walls adorned with a few gaudily coloured popular pictures, but which was illuminated by Militona's presence. Its chaste indigence, its maidenly simplicity were pleasant to the soul; for innocent and proud poverty is poetical. A charming being really needs so little.

When Andrès compared this simple chamber to Doña Felician's pretentious apartment, which was in such bad taste, the clock, the curtains, the statuettes, and the little dogs of his betrothed struck him as more ridiculous than ever before.

A silvery tinkling was heard in the street. It was the flock of milch-goats passing along and making their bells tinkle.

"There's my breakfast coming along," gaily said Militona, as she laid down her work upon the table. "I must go down to intercept it. To-day I shall buy a larger quantity, since there are two of us and the physician allows you to take some nourishment."

"You will not find me a difficult guest to feed," said Andrès, smiling.



MILITONA

“That is all very fine; eating makes you hungry, when the milk is pure and the bread white, and my tradesmen do not cheat me.”

So saying, she vanished, humming under her breath the refrain of an old song, but returned in a few minutes, her cheeks rosy and her breath short, on account of having ascended rapidly the steps of the steep staircase, and holding in her hand a jug filled with foaming milk.

“I hope, sir, I did not leave you alone too long, but there are eighty steps to go down and to come up afterwards, which is worse.”

“You are as quick and lively as a bird, and the dark stair must have looked like Jacob’s ladder just now.”

“What do you mean?” asked Militona, quite guilelessly and not aware that Andrès was paying her a compliment.

“I mean that an angel was going down,” answered Andrès, drawing one of Militona’s hands to his lips, as she divided the milk into two cups.

“Come, you flatterer, eat and drink your share; you shall not have a bit more, even were you to call me an archangel.”



MILITONA

She held out to him a brown cup, half-full, with a small piece of that delicious, close, even, dazzlingly white bread which is to be had in Spain only.

“It is poor fare for you, my friend, but since you choose to put on the dress of a man of the people, you must even put up with the sort of breakfast that he whose dress you wore would have. It will teach you not to go disguising yourself any more.”

While speaking she was blowing off the light foam that topped her cup, and sipping the milk. A pretty white line showing above her red lip indicated the point reached by the milk.

“And by-the-bye,” she added, “now that you are allowed to speak, you have to explain to me how it comes that after seeing you at the Plaza de Toros, in a tight-fitting frock-coat, and dressed in the latest Parisian fashion, I came to find you in front of my door in a manolo costume. Which was the disguise, the dress you wore there or the one you wore here? Although I am not much acquainted with the world, I fancy that the aspect in which I first saw you was the real one. Your little white hands that have never worked go to prove it.”

“You are right, Militona. It was the desire to see



MILITONA

you again and the fear of bringing danger upon you that caused me to put on the jacket, sash, and hat, for my ordinary dress would too speedily have attracted attention to me in this neighbourhood. With the other costume on, I was but a unit in the crowd, and no eye but that of a jealous lover could have recognised me."

"Or that of one who loved you," returned Militona, blushing. "Your disguise did not deceive me for one moment. I had thought that what I said to you at the bull-fight would prevent your trying to see me again; I hoped it would, for I foresaw the trouble that has since befallen you; yet I should have been sorry had you really obeyed me."

"And may I ask a few questions about that terrible Juancho?"

"Did I not tell you, when his knife was drawn against me, that I loved you? Was not that answering all your questions before they were put?" returned the girl, looking at Andrès with her great innocent eyes, and her face radiant with sincerity.

Whatever doubts might have existed in his mind concerning the relations between the torero and the girl vanished into thin air.



MILITONA

“ Besides, my dear patient, if it will give you the least pleasure, I can tell you his story and mine in a few words. Let me begin with my own. My father, an obscure soldier, was killed during the Civil War while heroically fighting for the cause he believed to be the best. His great deeds would be sung by poets had they taken place on some famous battle-field instead of in a narrow mountain gorge in the sierras of Aragon. My dear mother was unable to survive the loss of her beloved husband, and I was left an orphan at the age of thirteen, with no other relative in the world than Aldonza, who, being poor herself, could not help me very much.

“ Nevertheless, as my needs are small, I managed to make my living by the work of my hands under the kindly Spanish sky that feeds its children with sunshine and light. My greatest extravagance was to go, on Mondays, to the bull-fights; for we girls who have not, like society young ladies, reading, music, the theatre, and evening parties, we love those simple and grand exhibitions in which man's courage triumphs over the blind impetuosity of brutes. It was there that Juancho saw me and conceived for me a mad love and frantic passion. In spite of his



MILITONA

manly beauty, his brilliant costumes, and his superhuman exploits, he never inspired me with any feeling in his favour. Whatever he did increased my aversion instead of inclining me towards him.

“ Still, he worshipped me so devotedly that I often thought it was ungrateful of me not to return his love, but love is independent of our will, and God sends it to us when He pleases. Observing that I did not care for him, Juancho became suspicious and jealous ; he wearied me with his pertinacious attentions ; he kept watch over me, spied upon me, and was always on the look-out for imaginary rivals. I had to be careful of where I looked and of what I said, for a single word, a single look sufficed for Juancho to pick some dreadful quarrel. He caused me to live in solitude, and placed me in the centre of a circle of terror through which ere long no one dared break.”

“ But which I have broken for ever, I trust ; for I fancy he is not likely to return now.”

“ Not very soon at least, for he must be in hiding, to escape arrest, until you are well again. But you yourself, who are you ? It is high time I asked, is it not ? ”



MILITONA

“My name is Andrès de Salcedo. I am rich enough to do that only which seems to me worthy of a man of honour, and I am not dependent on any one.”

“But you are surely engaged to some lovely, rich, and well dressed girl?” said Militona, with anxious curiosity.

Andrès would have preferred not to lie, yet it was not easy for him to own the truth, so he made an evasive reply. Militona did not press the matter, but she turned pale and became thoughtful.

“Could you manage to get me a pen and a scrap of paper? I should like to write to some friends of mine whom my disappearance must have rendered anxious, and reassure them as to my fate.”

The girl succeeded in discovering, in the recesses of a drawer, an old sheet of letter paper, a twisted pen, and an ink bottle in which the dried up fluid formed a sort of coating of lacquer. A few drops of water restored its pristine fluidity to the ink and Andrès managed to scribble on his knees the following note, addressed to Don Geronimo Vasquez de los Rios:

“MY DEAR FATHER-IN-LAW TO BE, — Do not worry over my disappearance. An accident, which

MILITONA

entails no serious consequences, detains me for a time in the house where I was taken. I hope, in the course of a few days, to present my respects to Doña Feliciana.”

“ANDRÈS DE SALCEDO.”

This very Machiavelian letter gave neither the address of the house nor any particulars, so that the writer might later on colour, as need might require, the circumstances of the case. It would suffice to quiet the uneasiness of the old gentleman and Feliciana, and enable Andrès — who was not aware that Don Geronimo was so well posted, thanks to the sagacity displayed by Argamasilla and Covachuelo — to gain time.

Tia Aldonza took the letter to the post, and Andrès, his mind at ease on this point, gave himself up unreservedly to the sweet and poetic sensations inspired in him by the poor chamber which Militona’s presence enriched.

He felt the mighty and pure delight of true love, which is not the result of any social convention, which is unstained by the flattery of self-love, the pride of conquest, and the fancies of the imagination,



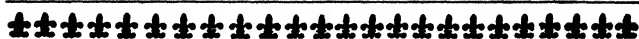
MILITONA

— the love which springs from the happy union of youth, beauty, and innocence, that sublime trinity.

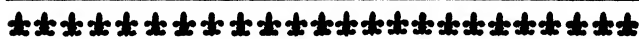
According to the dilettanti of love, — who sip it, as they do an ice, and wait, in order to appreciate it the more, until it has melted away, — Militona's outspoken avowal ought to have deprived Andrès of many fine shades, of many delicate gradations, by its wild suddenness. A woman of the world would have spent six months in preparing the effect of the words, but then Militona was not a woman of the world.

Don Geronimo, on the receipt of Andrès' letter, carried it to his daughter, and said very jubilantly : —

“ Here, Feliciana, is a letter from your betrothed.”



MILITONA



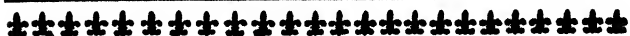
IX

FELICIANA took the paper handed her by her father with a very disdainful look, observed that it was not cream-laid, and said : —

“A letter without an envelope and sealed with a wafer ! What very bad form ! I suppose I shall have to overlook it in consideration of the peculiar circumstances. Poor Andrès ! To think he has not even a stick of sealing-wax at his disposal, or any decent letter-paper. He must be very unhappy. Did you ever see such a rag as that, Sir Edward ? ” added she, as she passed the letter, after perusing it, to the young gentleman of the Prado, who had become an assiduous visitor to the house since Andrès had disappeared.

“By Jove ! ” returned the islander, struggling with the Spanish speech ; “Australian Bushmen can turn out better stuff than that. This is the crudest sort of paper, and in London it would not be used to wrap up penny-dips even.”

“Speak English, Sir Edward,” said Feliciana ; “you know that I understand it.”



MILITONA

“No, I had rather perfect myself in Spanish, which is your tongue.”

This compliment made Feliciana smile sweetly, for she rather liked Sir Edward. Much more than Andrès did he realise her idea of elegance and comfort; he was, if not the most civil, at least the most civilised of men. Whatever he wore was made by the latest and most improved processes. Every one of his garments was “improved” and cut out of patent water-proof and fireproof cloth. He carried a pocket-knife that was also a razor, a cork-screw, a spoon, a fork, and a drinking-cup; a flint and steel that included wax vestas, an ink-bottle, wafers, and a stick of sealing-wax; his canes could be transformed into chairs, umbrellas, tent-poles, and even canoes, if the need arose for one, and he had innumerable other inventions of the sort enclosed in compartment boxes such as are carried about, from the Pole to the Equator, by the sons of perfidious Albion, who need more implements than anybody else in order to struggle through life.

If Feliciana could have seen the gentleman’s dressing-table, she would have been hopelessly overcome. The united cases of a surgeon, a dentist, and a pedicure contain fewer steel instruments of strange and alarming



MILITONA

shape. In spite of his attempts at "high life," Andrès had always remained far short of such sublimity.

"Suppose we go and call on dear Andrès, father? Sir Edward might come with us, and it would thus be less formal, for, although I am engaged to him, the mere fact of calling on a young man offends propriety, or at least savours of riskiness."

"What possible harm can there be in it, since Sir Edward and I will be with you?" answered Don Geronimo, who could not help thinking his daughter rather prudish. "For the matter of that, if you think it would not be proper for you to go to see Don Andrès, I can go alone, and I will bring you back the most detailed account of him."

"No, one must be prepared to make some sacrifices in favour of those one loves," replied Feliciano, who was not sorry to have the opportunity of seeing things for herself.

Señorita Vasquez, though a well brought-up young lady, was a woman, and the thought that her lover — though her attachment to him was but slight — was in the house of a manola reported to be pretty, troubled her more than she cared to confess to herself even. The most dried-up feminine heart always has some



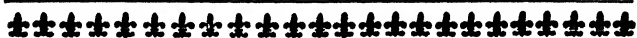
MILITONA

chord that vibrates when touched by self-love and jealousy.

Without quite understanding why, Feliciana dressed herself in a way that was most striking and quite out of place under the circumstances. Foreseeing a rivalry, she got herself up from head to foot in the finest armour she could find in the arsenal of her wardrobe; not that with her bourgeois disdain of a mere manola she feared for a moment to be surpassed by her, but she instinctively desired to crush her by the exhibition of her splendour, and to fill Andrès with admiration and love. She selected a straw-coloured gros de Naples bonnet, which caused her fair hair and colourless face to look deader than usual, an apple-green cape, trimmed with white lace, which she put on over a sky-blue gown; lilac shoes, and black net gloves stitched with blue. A pink sunshade, trimmed with lace, and a bag heavily embroidered with steel beads completed her get-up. Not a seamstress or a maid but would have said to her : —

“You are beautifully dressed, Señorita.”

Consequently, when she took a last look at herself in her mirror, she smiled with satisfaction, for never had she looked more like a plate in a fashion paper without subscribers.



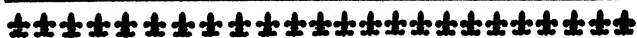
MILITONA

Sir Edward, who gave his arm to Feliciana, was dressed just as foppishly. His hat had a very narrow brim, the tails of his coat were very short, his vest was of a loud check pattern, his shirt collar stuck up very high, and his "improved moreen foundation" satin cravat formed a fit companion costume for the magnificence displayed by Don Geronimo's daughter. Never had a better-matched couple walked side by side. They were made for each other and their admiration was mutual.

The Calle del Povar was reached, not without many a grumble on Feliciana's part concerning the wretched state of the paving, the narrowness of the streets, and the gloomy look of the buildings, the young Englishman sympathising with her and praising the broad stone and asphalt pavements, the wide streets, and the regular buildings of his native city.

"What!" said Feliciana, with infinite disgust, "is it in front of this hovel that Don Andrès was picked up disguised and wounded? What was he doing in such a horrid place?"

"I suppose," replied the young knight, in his Hispano-British lingo, "that he was studying the manners of the people or wanted to try his skill with the knife, just as,



MILITONA

in London, I get into rows in the Temple or Cheap-side to have the chance of trying a new facer."

"We shall soon know the truth of the matter," added Don Geronimo.

The three visitors entered the alley-way of the unfortunate house that excited Feliciana's contempt, though it held a treasure such as one might often look for in vain in the finest mansions. Feliciana picked up her skirts as she proceeded, and when she reached the stairs, shuddered at the thought of touching the greasy hand-rope with her spotless kid glove. She therefore asked Sir Edward to again give her his arm.

An officious neighbour led the way, and the perilous ascent began.

When Don Geronimo had answered, *Gente de paz* ("Peaceful visitors"), to the startled inquiry of tia Aldonza, who was in a constant state of terror since Juancho's outburst, the door opened and Andrès, already disquieted by the accents of the well-known voice, beheld first Sir Edward, who formed the vanguard, then Don Geronimo, and finally Feliciana, in all the luxury of her ultra-pretentious toilet.

She had reserved herself as the crowning glory of the surprise, either because she instinctively appreciated



MILITONA

gradation in effects, or because she feared to overwhelm too suddenly dear Andrès with a happiness beyond his strength to bear, or because she did not consider it proper to enter first into a room where a young man was lying in bed. But her entrance failed to produce the dramatic sensation she had reckoned on. Not only was Andrès not dazzled, not only did he not appear to be whelmed by the deepest happiness, not only did he not shed tears of emotion at the thought of the superhuman sacrifice involved in ascending three pairs of stairs accomplished in his favour by so much dressed-up a young lady, but actually his features were overspread with an unmistakable expression of annoyance.

The sensation was the deadeast of failures.

At the sight of the three visitors, Militona had risen and offered one of her two chairs to Don Geronimo, with the respectful deference invariably shown by a modest maiden to an old man, and she signed to tia Aldonza to offer the other to Señorita Vasquez. The latter, having pulled up the skirt of her sky-blue gown as if she were afraid of soiling it, let herself fall upon the cane seat, gasped, and fanned herself with her handkerchief.



MILITONA

“Well!” she said, “you *are* high up. I thought I should never have breath enough to get up here.”

“The Señorita laces too tightly, perhaps,” put in Militona, with an air of perfect simplicity.

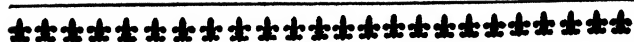
Though Feliciana was thin, she did lace as tightly as she could, and replied in the sneering tone women know how to adopt in such circumstances, —

“I never lace tight.”

There was no mistake that matters were going wrong from the start, and that the society girl was getting the worst of it. Militona, in her black silk dress, cut in the Spanish fashion, her pretty arms bare, and a flower in her hair, made the bad taste and over-richness of Feliciana’s dress appear still more ridiculous. Señorita Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios looked like an English lady’s-maid got up in her Sunday best, and Militona like a duchess desirous of preserving her incognito.

To make up for the check she had suffered, Don Geronimo’s daughter attempted to disconcert the manola by looking at her with supreme disdain, but she failed to produce any effect, and had at last to lower her eyes before the clear and modest glance of the work-girl.

“What can that woman be?” Militona asked herself. “Can she be Andrès’ sister? That is not pos-



MILITONA

sible, for she would be like him and would not look so insolent."

"Well, Andrès," said Don Geronimo, drawing nearer the bed, and speaking affectionately, "you have had a narrow escape. How are you feeling now?"

"Fairly well, thanks to this young lady's care."

"We shall take care that she is suitably rewarded for her pains," put in Feliciana. "She shall have a gold watch, a ring, or other piece of jewellery, as she prefers."

Militona, thus challenged, looked so naturally regal and so haughtily majestic, that Señorita Vasquez felt quite put out, her sweet remark having been intended to bring the lovely creature down from the pedestal of her beauty.

Sir Edward could not refrain from uttering a "She is a very pretty girl," quite forgetting that Feliciana understood English.

Andrès replied in a dry tone, —

"Services such as this young lady has rendered me cannot be paid for."

"Of course not," said Don Geronimo, "and no one dreams of doing so. But she ought to have some token of our gratitude."



MILITONA

"You must be very uncomfortable here, dear Andrès," went on Señorita Vasquez, taking in at a glance all that was lacking in the humble room.

"Don Andrès has been good enough to make no complaints," returned Militona as she withdrew to the window, as if to leave Feliciana free to be impertinent, and to say to her tacitly: "You are in my house, and so I do not turn you out; I may not do so, but I do draw the line between my patience as your hostess and your insults."

Feliciana began to feel embarrassed, and tapped her shoe with the end of her parasol.

There was a moment of silence.

Don Geronimo fished out from the corner of his snuff-box a pinch of *polvo sevillano* (yellow snuff), which he applied to his venerable nose with an easy gesture that smacked of the good old days.

Sir Edward, in order to avoid taking sides, assumed so perfect an air of stupidity that it might well have been natural.

Tia Aldonza, her eyes wide open, her mouth agape, was admiring with her whole soul Feliciana's astounding dress. The loud combination of sky-blue, yellow, pink, apple-green, and lilac filled her with simple-



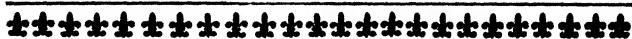
MILITONA

minded amazement. Never had she been so close to such splendour.

As for Andrès, he cast a deep look of love and protection upon Militona, who was standing at the other end of the room, radiant with beauty. He wondered he could ever have thought of marrying Felicianà, for he now saw her as she really was: an artificial creature turned out by a boarding-school mistress and a fashionable dressmaker.

Militona was saying to herself:

“It is very strange. I have never hated any one, but as soon as that woman entered the room, I felt a thrill, as if an unknown foe were approaching. Yet I have nothing to fear. I am quite sure that Andrès is not in love with her; I can see it in his eyes. She is not pretty and she is a fool, else she would not have come got up like that to call upon a sick man in a lowly house. A sky-blue gown and an apple-green cape! What lack of taste! I hate her, the tall, gawky thing. What does she come here for? To get hold of her betrothed, no doubt, for she must be engaged to him, though Andrès did not breathe a word of it to me. Oh! how wretched I should be if he married her! But he will not; it is impossible.



MILITONA

She has ugly fair hair and she is freckled, and Andrès told me he cared only for black hair and a clear complexion."

Feliciana, meanwhile, was also making remarks to herself. She was analysing Militona's beauty with the liveliest desire to find some flaw in it, but, to her great regret, she failed to do so. Women, like poets, appreciate their own worth fully, and know their own strength, though they will never acknowledge it. Her ill temper increased, and she said rather sourly to poor Andrès :

"Unless your physician has forbidden you to talk, you might tell us how you came to this pass, for we have had only a mixed-up account of your adventure."

"Do try to tell us your romantic story," said the Englishman.

"You want him to talk, but you see he is still very weak," said Don Geronimo, with fatherly kindness.

"It will not tire him very much, and at need this young lady can help him out ; she must be acquainted with the whole business."

Thus addressed Militona approached her visitors.

"I took a fancy," said Andrès, "to disguise myself as a manolo in order to wander through the old quarters and to enjoy the bright bustle of the wine-shops



MILITONA

and the public dance-rooms; for, as you are aware, Feliciano, while I admire civilisation I love our old Spanish customs. As I was passing through this street, I came upon a savage serenader, who picked a quarrel with me and wounded me with his knife, in a perfectly fair fight and without any treachery. I fell, and this young lady picked me up half-dead on the threshold of the house-door."

"Why, Andrès, that is very romantic, and it would make a capital subject for a ballad if it were a little bit improved upon. Two angry rivals meet under the balcony of a fair lady," — as she spoke she looked at Militona and laughed an ugly, forced laugh. "They smash their guitars over each other's heads and slash each other's faces. The scene, engraved on wood for a frontispiece to the ballad, would be uncommonly effective. It would make any blind man rich."

"Madam," said Militona, "if the blow had been an eighth of an inch lower, it would have gone through his heart."

"I dare say, but as is always the case, the blade slipped so as to inflict an interesting wound only."

"Which does not interest you much, at all events," retorted the girl.



MILITONA

"It was not received in my honour, and I cannot therefore feel as deeply about it as you do. Nevertheless, you see that I have come to call upon your patient. If you like, we can nurse him in turns ; it would be quite delightful."

"I have nursed him alone until now, and I shall continue to do so," replied Militona.

"I recognise that by comparison with you I may seem cold ; but then I am not in the habit of taking young men into my room, even when they have their breast a little bit scored."

"You would have let him die in the street for fear of compromising yourself?"

"We are not all so free as you ; we have to think of consequences, for those of us who have a character would be sorry to lose it."

"Come, come, Feliciano ; you are talking nonsense, and getting angry about nothing," said Don Geronimo, seeking to smooth matters over. "All that has happened has been unforeseen. Andrès never saw this young lady before his accident occurred. Do not turn jealous and get things into your head without any reason."

"A betrothed is not a mistress," went on Feli-



MILITONA

ciana, majestically, without heeding her father's remarks.

Militona turned pale at this crowning insult. Her eyes grew moist, her bosom heaved, her lips swelled, and she choked down a sob, but she mastered herself, and replied only with a look of crushing contempt.

"Let us go, father ; I have no business to be here. I cannot stay longer in the home of an abandoned woman."

"If that is your only reason for leaving, Señorita, stay," said Andrès, taking Militona's hand in his. "Doña Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios need not cut short her visit to Señora Andrès de Salcedo, whom I beg to introduce you to. I should never forgive myself if I were the cause of your being rude."

"What is that, Andrès ?" exclaimed Don Geronimo. "And your marriage settled ten years ago ! You must be crazy."

"On the contrary, I am quite sensible," replied the young fellow. "I could never have made your daughter happy."

"Nonsense ; you are off your head ; you are ill and feverish," went on Geronimo, who had accustomed himself to look upon Andrès as his son-in-law.



MILITONA

“Do not worry,” put in the Englishman, pulling Don Geronimo by the sleeve. “You will never want for sons-in-law, for your daughter is so beautiful and dresses so well.”

“You were so well matched in the way of money,” went on Don Geronimo.

“Better than in the way of hearts,” returned Andrès. “I do not think Señorita Vasquez will greatly regret me.”

“How modest of you !” retorted Feliciana. “Well, to relieve you of any remorse you might feel, I shall let you believe that. Farewell ; may your married life be happy, Madam. I wish you good-day.”

Militona returned Feliciana’s ironical nod with a dignified bow.

“Come, father. Sir Edward, your arm.”

The Englishman, thus called upon, gracefully rounded his arm like the handle of an amphora, and they went out most majestically.

The young Briton was delighted. What had just occurred allowed hopes which he had hitherto choked down to spring up in his breast. Feliciana, whom he discreetly loved, was free ! The long projected match was broken off.

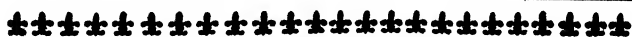


MILITONA

“ Oh ! ” said he to himself, as he felt on his sleeve the girl’s gloved hand, “ it has always been my dream to marry a Spaniard, a Spaniard with a passionate, ardent heart, who would make my tea as I like it. I am of Lord Byron’s opinion : ‘ Away with the pale beauties of the North ! ’ I have sworn I would never marry any one but a Hindoo, an Italian, or a Spaniard. I prefer a Spaniard on account of the Romancero and the War of Independence. I have met many who were ardent, but they did not make tea the way I like ; indeed, they committed unpardonable solecisms. But Feliciana is so well brought-up ! What a sensation she will make in London, at Almack’s and at fashionable routs ! No one will believe that she comes from Madrid. Won’t I be happy ! We shall spend the summers with the children at Calcutta or at the Cape, where I have a cottage. It will be splendid ! ”

Such were the golden dreams Sir Edward dreamed as he escorted Señorita Vasquez to her home.

Feliciana herself was indulging in reflections of a similar character. Of course she felt much annoyed on account of what had just happened ; not that she greatly regretted Andrès, but she was angered at having been forestalled. It is always unpleasant to be forsaken



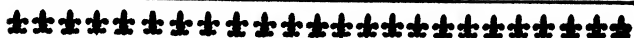
MILITONA

by a man, even when one does not care for him, and since she had made the acquaintance of Sir Edward, Feliciana had looked upon her engagement to Andrès in a less favourable light. Having found in Sir Edward the personification of her ideal, she perceived that she had never loved Andrès.

Sir Edward was absolutely the sort of Englishman she had dreamed of. Clean-shaven, rosy, fresh, well brushed, well combed, well groomed, with a white neck-tie on from early morning; an Englishman in a water-proof and mackintosh; the highest expression of civilisation!

Then he was so punctual, so correct, so mathematically on time in his calls. No chronometer could surpass him in this respect.

“What a happy life one could lead with such a man,” said Señorita Feliciana Vasquez de los Rios to herself. “I should have English plate, Wedgwood ware, carpets all through the house, and servants with powdered hair. I should drive in a four-in hand in Hyde Park with my husband, and at night, at the Theatre-Royal, I should listen to Italian music from a box lined with buttercup damask. Deer would roam about on the lawn of our country seat, and perhaps,



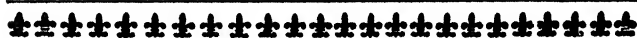
MILITONA

too, rosy, fair-haired children. Children look very well on the back seat of a carriage, with a thorough-bred King Charles spaniel by them."

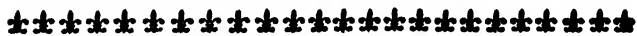
Let us leave these two beings, so well calculated to appreciate each other, to go on their way, and return to the Calle del Povar to Andrès and Militona.

The girl, after the departure of Feliciano, Don Geronimo, and Sir Edward, had thrown herself on Andrès' neck with a burst of happiness and tears; but they were tears of joy and delight, that streamed gently down in transparent pearls upon her beauteous downy cheeks without reddening her divine eyelids.

The day was sinking, and the sunset sky was dappled with pretty rosy clouds. In the distance was heard the strumming of guitars, the rumble of tambourines played by the dancers, and the rattle of the castanets. The "Ay!" and "Ola!" of the stanzas of the farandola came in harmonious bursts from all the street corners and crossings, and all these joyous national sounds formed a sort of faint epithalamium for the happiness of the two lovers. Night was now fallen, and still Militona's head rested on Andrès' shoulder.



MILITONA



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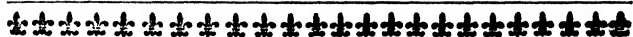
I HAVE rather lost sight of friend Juancho, and it would only be right to look after him, for he left Militona's room in such a state of exasperation that it bordered on frenzy. Cursing and gesticulating wildly, he had reached, without being aware of where he was going, the Hierro Gate, and had wandered out into the country.

The environs of Madrid are bare and desolate; the walls of the wretched buildings scattered along the roadside are of an earthen colour, and in these buildings are carried on such unpleasant and unhealthy businesses as are excluded from large cities. The bare ground is strewn with bluish rocks that grow larger the nearer one approaches to the foot of the Sierra de Guadamarra, the summits of which, still covered with snow at the beginning of summer, show in the distance like small dappled clouds. Scarcely any trace of vegetation is visible. The dried-up torrent-beds make hideous cicatrices in the ground, while the hills and slopes, destitute of verdure, compose a landscape quite

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And all the wandering population that, within a radius of ten miles, brings to market three green apples or a bunch of pimentos.



MILITONA

in harmony with melancholy feelings. Gaiety would be silenced out there, but despair, at least, feels it is safe from raillery.

After walking for an hour or two, Juancho, borne down by stress of thought, he who would not have bowed under the weight of the gates of Gaza that Samson carried off, threw himself by the side of a ditch, leaned on his elbows, holding his chin and cheeks in his hands, and remained motionless in a condition of absolute prostration.

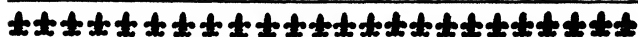
He watched, without seeing them, the long line of chariots passing by; the oxen, which, frightened by the body they saw lying on the roadside, would shy as they passed him and be touched up with the driver's goad in return; the asses, laden with straw fastened with wicker bands; banditti-looking peasants, proudly bestriding their horses, one hand on the hip and a rifle on the saddle-bow; grim peasant-women, dragging along a crying child; old Castilians, wearing their wolf-skin helmets; men of La Mancha, in black breeches and milled stockings; and all the wandering population that, within a radius of ten miles, brings to market three green apples or a bunch of pimento.

MILITONA

Juancho was suffering atrociously, and tears, the first he had ever shed, were falling down his brown cheeks to the careless earth, that drank them up as though they were mere rain-drops. His mighty chest, swelled by deep sighs, made his whole body heave. Never had he been so unhappy ; the world seemed to be coming to an end ; he saw no purpose in the world or in life. What was he to do henceforth ?

“ She does not love me, she loves another man,” he kept on repeating to himself, as he tried to demonstrate to himself the fatal truth his heart would not believe in. “ Can it be possible ? Can it be credible ? She, so proud, so shy, to have suddenly fallen madly in love with a stranger, while I, who have been living but for her, who have followed her for two years like her own shadow, I cannot get from her a single word of pity, a single smile of indulgence ! I thought I was to be pitied before, but it was paradise in comparison with what I am suffering now. If she did not love me, at least she loved no one else.

“ I could see her ; she would tell me to go, never to return, that I annoyed her, wearied her, haunted her, that she could no longer put up with my tyrannical ways ; but at least, when I did go she was alone. At



MILITONA

night I wandered under her windows, mad with desire and drunk with love, but I knew that she was sleeping chastely in her virgin couch ; I had not to dread seeing another shadow than hers upon her curtain. I was wretched, but I enjoyed this much consolation, that no one else was more fortunate than I. The treasure was not mine, but no one else had the key to it.

“But now it is all over ; all hope is gone. She repulsed me when she did not love any one ; what will it be now her repulsion for me is increased by all her passion for another ? Ah ! I know too well ! That was why I was so careful to drive away every man who was attracted by her beauty. Right good watch did I keep upon her. I settled poor Luca and poor Ginès, though they had done nothing, and I let that other fellow get by me, my real rival, the dangerous one, whom I ought to have killed. Be punished, unskilful hand, stupid slave that couldst not do thy duty !”

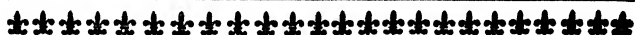
And he bit his right hand so hard that he nearly made it bleed.

“Once he is cured, I shall challenge him again, and I shall not miss him this time. But if I kill him Militona will never look upon me again ! In any case



MILITONA

she is lost to me. It is enough to drive a man crazy, for there is no way out of it. If he could only die a natural death in some unexpected catastrophe, be burned up in a fire, be crushed under a falling wall, be swallowed up by an earthquake, fall a victim to the plague! But there is no such luck for me. Hell and damnation! to think that her lovely soul, her perfect body, her glorious eyes, her heavenly smile, her round and supple neck, her taper waist, her tiny foot, all, all are his! He is allowed to take her hand, and she does not withdraw it; he can bend her adored head to his, and she does not turn away with disdain. What have I done that I should be punished so cruelly? There are so many handsome girls in Spain who would ask no better than to see me at their feet! When I step into the bull-ring, more than one heart flutters within a lovely bosom, more than one fair hand sends me friendly greeting. How many girls in Seville, in Madrid, in Granada, carried away by admiration for my courage and my handsome mien, have thrown me their fans, their handkerchiefs, the flower from their hair, the golden necklace from their neck. Well, I would have none of them. I cared only for her who would have none of me. Of all the loves proffered me I chose



MILITONA

the one hate. Oh! invincible attraction! oh! fatal destiny! Poor Rosaura, who bore me such simple love, which I did not return, madman that I was, how you must have suffered! No doubt I am now bearing the penalty of the pain I caused you. The world is all out of joint. Love should produce love, and then no one would suffer. God is cruel! It may be because I did not burn candles before the image of Our Lady that these misfortunes have befallen me. Oh! God in heaven! what shall I do? Never shall I know a moment's peace on earth. Lucky was Dominguez to be slain by the bull, for he also loved Militona; and yet I did all I could to save him. Then she accused me of forsaking him in his peril, for not only does she hate me, she despises me. It is enough to drive me mad!"

Thus speaking, he sprang up and wandered on through the fields.

He walked on the whole day, crazy, haggard, with fists clenched. Cruel hallucinations showed him Andrès and Militona strolling together, hand in hand, embracing each other, looking languorously at each other, in every way that could most cause a jealous heart to suffer. He saw these things in such vivid colours,



MILITONA

so strikingly real, that more than once he leapt forward to stab Andrès, but his knife met the void only, and he awoke from his dream in amazement.

The shapes of objects were growing blurred to his sight; his temples were throbbing; his brow seemed to be pressed with an iron band; his eyes were burning; and he felt cold although the sweat was pouring off his face in the June sunshine.

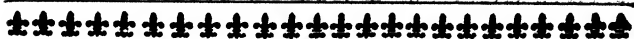
An ox-driver, whose cart had upset, the wheel having passed over a big stone, tapped him on the shoulder and said : —

“ Look here, you look as if you were strong in the arms. Will you not help me to get my cart up again ? my poor oxen have tried in vain.”

Juancho approached, and without a word started to lift the cart up, but his hands trembled, his legs gave way under him, and his unconquered muscles refused to perform their office. He managed to lift the cart a little way, and then, breathless, exhausted, let it fall back.

“ You looked to me as if you were stronger than you are,” said the ox-driver, astonished at Juancho’s lack of success.

But Juancho’s strength was gone. The man was ill.



MILITONA

Nevertheless, stung by the driver's remark, and proud of his muscles like the true gladiator he was, he collected, by a tremendous effort of the will, all the strength he had left, and tried again furiously. The cart was up on its wheels as by magic, the driver not having had to help, and the shock was so violent that the vehicle nearly turned over on the other side.

"Well, you are a rare one!" cried the astounded driver. "Since the days of the Ocaña Hercules, who carried off the gratings of windows, and of Bernardo da Capio, who stopped mill-wheels with his finger, there has been no one to compare with you."

But Juancho did not reply, and fell in a swoon on the road, as falls a dead body, to recall Dante's turn.

"Can he have burst a blood-vessel?" said the driver, frightened. "No matter; since it was while assisting me that he has met with this accident, I shall put him on my cart and leave him in some inn at San Agostino or Alcobendas."

Juancho soon recovered from his swoon, although neither salts nor spirits were used to bring him to, ox-drivers generally being ill provided with such things. But then the torero was no boarding-school miss.

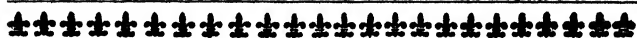
MILITONA

The driver threw his mantle over him ; Juancho was in a high fever, and he was experiencing a sensation hitherto unknown to him : he was ill. On reaching the posada de San Agostino, he asked for a bed and lay down.

He slept a dead sleep, the invincible sleep that seizes upon Redskins' prisoners in the midst of the tortures inflicted upon them by the ingenious cruelty of their victors, and which comes upon the condemned to death on the morning of their execution. When the organs are broken they will not supply the soul with the power to suffer.

It was his remaining unconscious for twelve hours that saved Juancho from going mad. At the end of that time he got up ; the fever had left him and he had no headache, but he was as weak as if he were convalescing after a six months' illness. The ground seemed to give way under his feet, the light dazed him, the least sound deafened him. He felt his mind a blank and his soul a void. A great breaking up had taken place in him ; where had been his love was now a great gulf fixed that nothing henceforth could fill up.

He remained a whole day in the inn ; then, feeling better, for his energetic constitution was reasserting

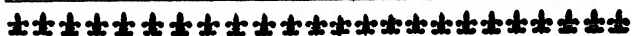


MILITONA

itself, he ordered a horse and proceeded to Madrid, drawn by the strange instinct that drags one back to a painful spectacle. He felt the need of pouring venom into his wounds, of making them larger, of turning the knife himself in his own heart. He was too far removed from his sorrow, and wanted to get closer to it, to fulfil his martyrdom in its entirety, to intoxicate himself with it, to forget the cause of his sufferings by carrying them to excess.

While Juancho was wandering round in his grief, alguazils were searching for him in every direction, for the common voice named him as the man who had stabbed Don Andrès de Salcedo. The latter, of course, had made no charge: it was enough that he should have taken from poor Juancho the girl he loved, without depriving him of liberty also. Andrès was not even aware that a warrant was out against Juancho.

Argamasilla and Covachuelo, the Orestes and Pylades of the police force, had started out with the intention of discovering and arresting Juancho, but they set about their job with infinite care, in view of the notoriously savage habits of that personage. It might even have been believed, and indeed there were men who coveted



MILITONA

the appointments of the two friends who declared it openly, that Covachuelo and Argamasilla made the minutest inquiries with a view to avoiding the man they were commissioned to arrest. A stupid spy, however, reported, as coolly as if his conscience were quite clear, that he had seen the culprit enter the Plaza de Toros. There was no help for it, the job had to be done.

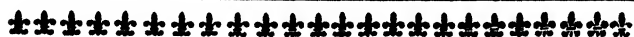
While on their way to the spot, Argamasilla said to his friend :

“I pray and beseech you, Covachuelo, not to be imprudent and to moderate your heroic impulses. You know that the fellow is quick with his knife, so do not expose the life of the greatest detective that ever lived to the mad fury of a brute.”

“Fear nothing,” answered Covachuelo, “I shall do my best to preserve your friend to you. I shall display my courage only at the last extremity when all other means have failed.”

Juancho had indeed entered the bull-ring, in order to have a look at the bulls that had been brought in for the morrow’s fight, and this more by force of habit than in pursuance of any set purpose.

He was still there, and crossing the arena, when

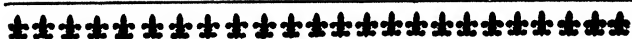


MILITONA

Argamasilla and Covachuelo turned up with their little squad. Covachuelo, with the utmost politeness and in the most ceremonious terms, informed Juancho that he must accompany him to the prison. Juancho shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and went on his way. At a sign from the detective, two men threw themselves on the torero, who shook them off as if they had been grains of dust on his sleeve.

Then the whole crowd dashed at him. Juancho hurled three or four of them a dozen yards away, but as numbers always prevail in the end over mere bodily strength, and a hundred pygmies can overcome a giant, Juancho, raging and fighting, made his way towards the toril, and once there rid himself by an abrupt twist of the men clinging to him, opened the door and dashed within the dangerous place of refuge, in which he shut himself up, very much like the tamer who, being pursued by sheriff's officers, took refuge in the cage in which he kept his tigers.

Juancho's assailants endeavoured to bring him to bay, but the door they were besieging suddenly opened and a bull, driven from its stall by the torero, dashed head down upon the terrified company.



MILITONA

The poor devils had barely time to leap over the barriers, and one of them did not manage to avoid having his trousers torn.

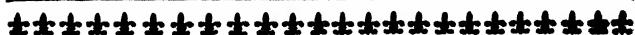
“The devil!” said Argamasilla and Covachuelo, “we shall have to regularly lay siege to him.”

“Let us try another assault.”

This time two bulls came out together and charged the assailants, but as these dispersed with the speed inspired by fright, the fierce brutes, seeing no other human foes, turned upon each other, locked their horns, dug their noses into the sand, and made desperate efforts to overthrow each other.

Covachuelo, holding carefully on to the door, shouted to Juancho : —

“Look here, my lad, you have five more bulls to let out : we know exactly the quantity of ammunition you have got. When those are out, you will have to surrender, and unconditionally at that. Now, if you will come out of your own accord, I shall take you to jail as pleasantly as I can, in a calesino that you shall pay for, without putting on you handcuffs or thumb-cords, and I shall say nothing of your having resisted the police, a thing that would get you a longer sentence. Can I say more ? ”



MILITONA

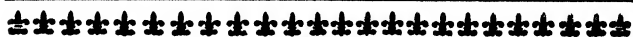
Juancho, not caring to fight longer for freedom, which was indifferent to him, gave himself up to Covachuelo and Argamasilla, who took him to the city prison with all the honours of war.

When the key had turned in the last lock, he cast himself on his bed and said : —

“ I have a great mind to kill myself.”

He had already forgotten that he was in a cell.

“ Yes, I ought to have killed her the day I found Andrès in her room. My vengeance would have been complete, and he would have suffered the most atrocious agony at seeing his mistress stabbed to death under his own eyes, while he himself, powerless, unable to move, was helpless to protect her. I should not have killed him ; I should not have been such a fool. Then I would have escaped into the hills or given myself up to justice, but in either case I should have been at peace. She must die if I am to live, or I must die if she is to live. I had my navaja in my hand, too ; all that I need have done was to strike one blow and all would have been over, but her eyes flamed out so and she was so desperately beautiful that I lost all power of will, all strength, all courage, — I, who can make lions turn away their eyes when I look



MILITONA

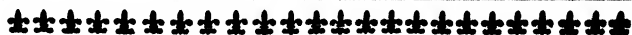
at them and compel bulls to crawl on their bellies like beaten dogs.

“But what? Wound her lovely bosom? Drive the cold steel into her heart and make her glorious red blood stream over her fair skin? No, I could not be so barbarous. Rather stifle her with a pillow, as the negro stifles the Venetian girl in the play I saw at the Teatro del Circo. Yet she has not deceived me, she has never sworn a false oath to me, she has always been despairingly cold to me. Never mind, I love her so madly that I have the right of life and death over her.”

Such were the thoughts that crowded in Juancho's brain as he lay in prison.

As for Andrès, he was recovering his strength rapidly; he was now up and, leaning on Militona's arm, had been able to walk round the room and to take the air at the window. Ere long he was well enough to get out and to return home to arrange for his approaching marriage.

Sir Edward, on his part, had made his proposal and formally asked for Felician's hand in marriage. Don Geronimo had eagerly given his consent, and Sir Edward was now busy with the wedding presents for his

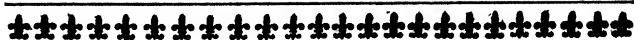


MILITONA

bride, ordering from London fabulously rich dresses and ornaments in the very worst taste. The Cashmere shawls were of jonquil-yellow, scarlet, and apple-green shades ; they had been brought from Lahore, the metropolis of shawls, by Sir Edward himself, for he owned two or three farms in that neighbourhood, and they were made of the hair of his own goats. Feliciana was in raptures.

Militona, although she was very happy, was not quite free from apprehensions. She dreaded feeling out of place in the society to which she would be introduced on her marriage to Andrès. No boarding-school mistress had destroyed the work of God in her case, and education had not replaced instinct. She had the feeling of right, of beauty, of all the poetry that is in art and in nature, but the feeling only. Her lovely hands had never fingered a key-board ; she could not read music, though she sang in a true and clear voice ; her literary knowledge was confined to a few novels, and the only reason she did not misspell her words was that Spanish orthography is of the simplest.

She would say to herself: “ I mean that Andrès shall have no cause to blush for me. I shall study, I shall learn, I shall make myself worthy of him. I sup-



MILITONA

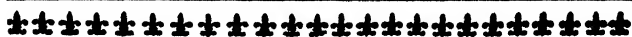
pose I am beautiful, for his eyes tell me that, and as for dresses, I have made enough of them to be able to wear them as well as any fine lady. We shall go to some quiet retreat and stay there until the poor chrysalis has had time to unfold her wings and to change into a butterfly. Oh ! I do hope nothing will happen to me ! The sky seems too blue and frightens me. What has become of Juancho, I wonder ? Can he be planning some desperate attempt ? ”

“ You need not fear that,” replied tia Aldonza, for Militona had spoken her last words aloud. “ Juancho is in jail, charged with having murdered Don Andrès de Salcedo, and his previous record is likely to make the business go hard with him.”

“ Poor Juancho ! I am sorry for him now. If Andrès did not love me, I should be intensely unhappy.”

The fact was that the case against Juancho was looking very black. The prosecuting attorney charged that the nocturnal fight had been nothing less than an ambush and homicide, and that Juancho had slain his victim with malice prepense. From this point of view the matter was serious.

Happily Andrès, thanks to the explanations he was in a position to make, and the trouble he took, succeeded



MILITONA

in proving that the murder had been merely a duel, with weapons, it is true, differing from those used by men of the world, but which he was in a position to accept, since he understood the handling of the navaja. Besides, the wound had proved to be not serious, and in a way he had been to blame for the quarrel. He considered that the outcome had been so fortunate for him that it was not too highly paid for by a stab.

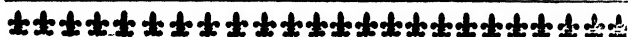
It stands to reason that a charge of murder cannot be long maintained, even by the most bloodthirsty attorney, when the victim is in good health and pleads on behalf of the murderer.

Juancho, therefore, was set free in a short time, with the regret of owing his liberty to the man he hated most on earth, and from whom he would not at any price have accepted a favour.

As he left the prison he said with a sombre look : —

“ Now I am bound by that accursed kindness of his. I am a coward, an infamous wretch if I do not hold that man’s life sacred henceforth. I would rather have been sent to the galleys for ten years, for when I came back I could have avenged myself.”

From that day Juancho disappeared. It was said that he had been seen galloping off on his black horse



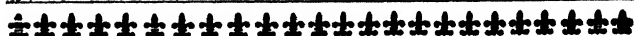
MILITONA

in the direction of Andalusia, but what was certain was that he was not again seen in Madrid.

Militona breathed more freely, for she knew Juancho well enough to be aware that nothing more was to be feared from him.

The two weddings took place on the same day in the same church. Militona had insisted on making her own wedding-gown; it was her masterpiece, and looked as if it had been cut out of lilies; it was so well made that nobody paid any attention to it.

Felician's dress was extravagantly rich, and when she left the church everybody said, "What a beautiful gown!" and when Militona appeared, "What a lovely girl!"



MILITONA

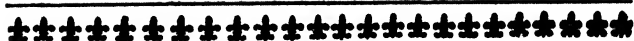


XI

NOT far from the old San Domingo convent, in the Antequerula quarter in Granada, on the slope of the hill, rose a dazzlingly white house, which shone like a silver block amid the dark-green foliage of the surrounding trees. Over the garden walls overflowed, as from an over-full cup, wildering tendrils of grapes and climbing plants that fell in great sheets on the street side.

Through the railings of the gate was seen first a peristyle, adorned with a mosaic formed of differently coloured pebbles, and next an inner court, a *patio*, as it is technically called, evidently of Moorish architecture.

The patio was surrounded by slender monolithic marble pillars, most gracefully proportioned, on the fanciful Corinthian capitals of which inscriptions in flowery Arabic characters, still showing traces of gilding, were intermingled with the volutes. Upon these capitals rested horse-shoe arches like those of the Alhambra, forming a covered gallery on the four sides of the court.



MILITONA

In the centre, in a basin on the edge of which were set vases of flowers and shrubs in boxes, splashed a light jet of water that scattered pearly drops upon the lustrous leaves, and seemed, with its crystalline voice, to whisper love secrets in the ear of the myrtles and the rose-laurels.

Over the court was stretched a tendido that transformed it into an open-air drawing-room filled with transparent shade and delicious coolness.

On the wall hung a guitar, and on a horse-hair sofa lay a large straw hat trimmed with green ribbons.

Any one passing along the street and casting a glance into the place, however poor an observer he might be, could not have failed to remark that happy people must live there. For happiness lights up homes and gives the houses in which it is found an air that others lack. Walls smile and weep, are joyous or sad, surly or hospitable, according to the character of the inhabitant who is their soul. And it was plain that these were animated by none but young lovers or a newly wedded pair.

The gate not being closed, I shall push it open and enter.

At the back of the patio, another gate, also standing open, led into a garden that was neither French nor



MILITONA

English, but of a kind to be met with in Granada only. It was a regular virgin forest of myrtles, orange and pomegranate trees, rose-laurels, Spanish jasmine, pistachio trees, sycamores, and terebinths, topped by a few century-old cypresses that rose silently into the blue of the heavens like a sorrowful thought in the midst of joy.

Through this wilderness of flowers and scent flashed the silvery waters of the Darro, brought from the summit of the hill by the wonderful hydraulic works due to the Arabs.

Rare plants bloomed in masses in old traceried Moorish vases, most graceful in outline, and adorned with verses from the Koran.

But the most remarkable thing was a walk bordered with laurels, with shining trunks and glossy leaves, down which ran two benches, the seats and backs of which were of marble, and two brooklets whose sparkling waters were confined in alabaster runlets.

At the end of the walk, on which the Andalusian sun could scarce cast a few golden spots through the close network of leaves, rose a small and elegant building, a sort of pavilion, of the kind called *tocador* or *mirador*



MILITONA

in Granada, and from which one enjoyed a vast and picturesque view.

The interior of the mirador was a gem of Moorish carving. The vaulting, which was of the class called *media-naranja* (half of an orange) by the Spaniards, presented such a complication of arabesques and ornaments that it was more like a madreporé or a honeycomb than the result of human labour. It is only in crystal grottoes that one comes upon such a quantity of carven stalactites.

At the back, in the marble setting of the window opening out upon an abyss, was displayed the most superb picture the eye of man could behold. In the foreground, through a wood of huge laurels, the Genil leaped and rushed down from the Sierra, in and out between boulders of marble and porphyry, hastening on to the Darro and Granada. Farther away stretched the rich Vega with its opulent vegetation, and in the very background, but so close that it seemed as if one could touch them, rose the mountains of the Sierra Nevada.

At this moment the sun was setting and flushing the snowy summits with a rose unlike anything on earth : a tender and soft rose, luminous, living, ideal, divine, of



MILITONA

a hue that is to be seen in Granada only, — a rose like the flush on the cheek of the maiden who for the first time hears words of love breathed in her ear.

A young man and a young woman, leaning near each other on the balcony, were admiring the splendid view together. The young man's arm was round the girl's waist, resting there in the security of mutual love.

After a few moments of silent contemplation, the young woman drew herself up and allowed to be seen a lovely face which, as my reader has no doubt guessed, was none other than that of Señora Andrès de Salcedo, or Militona, if the name under which she has been longest known be preferred. I need not add that the young man was Andrès.

Immediately after the wedding ceremony, Andrès and his wife had left for Granada, where the former owned a house bequeathed to him by an uncle. Felician had gone to London with Sir Edward; each of the couples thus obeying their instincts: the first seeking sunshine and poetry, the second civilisation and fog.

Militona, as she had said, had made up her mind not to make her appearance at once in the society to which her marriage with Andrès gave her admittance. She feared to disgrace Andrès by her charming ignorance,

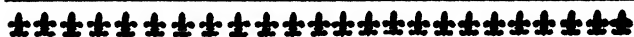


MILITONA

and so she had come to forget, in this happy retreat, the artless astonishment of poverty.

She had greatly improved both physically and mentally. Her beauty, which had seemed perfect, had grown greater. Sometimes, in a sculptor's studio, is to be seen an admirable statue that appears to be finished, yet the artist manages to add a new perfection to what was believed to be already perfect. So it was with Militona's beauty; happiness had given her the final touch, and innumerable details in her had become exquisitely delicate, thanks to the refinement and the attentions which wealth makes possible. Her beautifully shaped hands had become white, and the thinness due to work and care for the morrow had filled out. The lines of her lovely body swept in softer curves in all the security that marks the wealthy woman. Her bright disposition blossomed out freely and scattered around its flowers, scents, and fruits. Her virgin mind welcomed everything new and assimilated it with amazing facility, and Andrès enjoyed the pleasure of seeing appear in the woman he loved a woman superior to the one he had first known.

Instead of the disenchantment of possession, he discovered every day in his wife some new quality,



MILITONA

some unsuspected charm, and he congratulated himself on having had the courage to commit what society calls a mistake, — that is, though rich, to have married a pure and admirably beautiful girl who was passionately in love with him.

Should it not be in some sort the duty of rich men to draw from obscurity beautiful virtuous girls, dowerless queens of beauty, and to place them on the golden throne which is their right ?

Nothing was wanting to the happiness of Andrès and Militona. At times, however, she did think of poor Juancho, of whom all trace was lost. She could have wished that her felicity should not have caused sorrow to any one, and her joy was clouded by the thought of the unfortunate man's sufferings.

“No doubt he has forgotten me,” she says to herself in the endeavour to deceive herself. “He must have gone into some far off country, far, very far away.”

But had Juancho really forgotten Militona? That was not likely. He was not so far away as the young woman herself fancied, for, at the very moment when she was indulging in the thought, had she looked at the crest of the wall, on the side of the abyss, she would



MILITONA

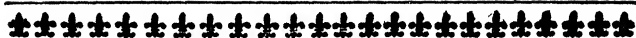
have seen flashing through the foliage a fixed, phosphorescent gaze like that of a tiger, and she would have recognised it by its glare.

“Shall we go for our walk to the Generalif,” said Andrès to her, “and breathe in the bitter scent of the rose-laurels and listen to the shrill call of the peacocks on the cypresses of Zoraida and Binder of Hearts?”

“It is still very hot, dear, and then I am not dressed,” replied Militona.

“What do you mean? You look lovely in that white dress, with your coral bracelet and the flower in your hair. Just put on a mantilla, and when you traverse the Alhambra all the old Moorish kings will want to rise up again.”

Militona smiled, adjusted the folds of her mantilla, took her fan, the inseparable companion of the Spanish woman, and the two strolled towards the Generalif, which, as is well known, is situated upon a hill connected with that crowned by the red towers of the Alhambra by the most picturesque ravine in the world, through which winds a path bordered by the richest vegetation. Señor and Señora de Salcedo went slowly along under the leafy bower, holding each other's hand and swinging their arms like a pair of children at play.



MILITONA

Behind the trunk of yonder fig-tree, whose dark-green leaves cast a shade as of night over the narrowing path, was that, or was it not, the gleam of a fire-arm, the yellow flash of a blunderbuss?

A man is lying full length among the lentisks and medlars, like a jaguar in wait for its prey, and mentally estimating the length of leap that will carry it on to the victim's back. It is Juancho, who for the past two months has been living in Granada, hidden in the gipsies' troglodyte dens, hollowed out in the escarpments of Monte Sagrado, where are the martyrs' caves. He has grown ten years older in the course of those two months; his complexion has darkened, his cheeks are hollow, and his eyes blazing; he is like a man devoured by a haunting thought — the thought that he must kill Militona.

Twenty times already, for he is constantly prowling around her, invisible, unrecognisable, watching for his chance, he has had opportunities of carrying out his purpose, but always, at the crucial moment, his heart has failed him.

This time, on his way to his ambush, — for he has noticed that every day, at about the same hour, Andrès and Militona pass that way, — he has sworn the most



MILITONA

dreadful oath that he will carry out his murderous intention and be done with the business once for all.

So there he lay, his loaded weapon by his side, watching, listening to the sound of the distant footsteps and at once justifying and encouraging himself by the reflection : —

“She has destroyed my soul; I have the right to destroy her body.”

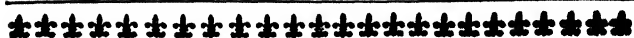
A sound of bright, laughing voices was heard at the end of the walk. Juancho started and turned livid; then he cocked his blunderbuss.

“Would not one say this path led to the terrestrial paradise?” Militona was saying to her husband. “It is so full of flowers and scents, sunbeams and song of birds. When the path is so beautiful one does not care to arrive even at the loveliest spot.”

As she spoke she had come abreast of the fatal fig-tree.

“How delightful and cool it is here. I feel so bright and happy.”

The muzzle of the invisible blunderbuss was aimed accurately in the direction of her face, that had never been lovelier and more smiling.



MILITONA

“Come, let me not yield to weakness,” murmured Juancho, as he put his finger on the trigger. “She is happy, she has just said so, and never was the opportunity more favourable. Let her die with these words.”

It was all up with Militona; the muzzle of the weapon, concealed in the foliage, almost touched her ear. In another second the charming head would be blown to pieces, and her beauty resolved into a hideous mingling of bloody flesh and shattered bones. But at the moment of breaking his idol, Juancho’s heart swelled, a cloud passed before his eyes. His hesitation lasted but a second, yet it was long enough to save Señora de Salcedo, who never knew the danger she had run, and who finished her stroll through the Generalif in perfect peace of mind.

“Well, there is no doubt that I am a coward,” said Juancho as he fled through the brushwood. “I have no courage save in the presence of bulls and men.”

Some time afterwards there was much talk of a torero who was a prodigy of skill and valour; never had any one been so rash as he. He gave out that he was from South America, from Lima, and he was just then performing at Puerto de Santa Maria.



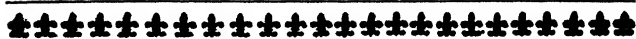
MILITONA

Andrès, who happened to be in Cadiz with his wife, having gone there to bid good-bye to a friend leaving for Manila, desired, as was natural in an aficionado, to see this hero of the bull-ring. Militona, gentle and tender-hearted though she was, was not the sort of woman to say nay to such a proposal, and the pair of them went down to the jetty, to take the steamer plying between Cadiz and Puerto, or one of the small craft, with an eye painted on either side the cutwater, so that their bows have a quaint human look.

The harbour-side presented a scene of extraordinary bustle and activity. The masters of the various crafts were fighting for clients and exchanging in turns compliments and insults. Shouts, oaths, and pleasantries passed to and fro between them, and every moment a boat, spreading its lateen sail to the breeze, was borne away like swan's-down over the crystal blue roadstead.

Andrès and Militona seated themselves in the stern of one of these crafts, the skipper of which, as he held out his arm to the young bride in order to assist her on board, hummed gaily a line from the Puerto bull song : —

“ Lift that dainty foot of thine ! ”

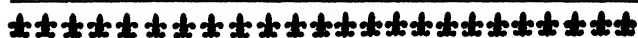


MILITONA

Cadiz is wonderfully beautiful seen from the sea, and deserves all the praise lavished upon it in Byron's two stanzas. It looks like a silver city set between two sapphire cupolas; it is the home of lovely women, and it is no small laudation of Militona to say that many gazed after and followed her upon the Alameda.

The truth is she looked lovely in her white lace mantilla, with a rose in her hair, her neckerchief fastened on the shoulders with a couple of cameos, her embroidered bodice, with fringes at the wrists and on the shoulders, her many-flounced skirt, her lace-work stockings, thinner than spiders' webs, setting off her shapely limbs, her pretty satin shoes on the smallest feet in the world, of which, to quote the Spanish song, it might have been said, "If the leg is a reality, the foot is an illusion."

Though she had become rich, Militona had preserved her love for Spanish fashions and customs; she had not turned French or English, and although she had the means to buy as many sulphur-yellow hats as any one in the Peninsula, she did not abuse her opportunities. The dress I have just described proves that she cared very little for Paris fashions.



MILITONA

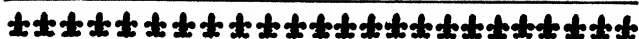
The crowd, dressed in brilliant colours, for Andalusia has not yet been invaded throughout its length and breadth by sombre black, swarming on the square or sitting down in the Vista Alegre inn and the neighbouring taverns until the bull-fight should begin, presented a bright and most animated spectacle.

Among the mantillas were to be seen the beautiful scarlet shawls covering the head and setting off so well the mat white faces of the women of Puerto de Santa Maria and Xeres de la Frontera. The majos, with a handkerchief hanging out of each of the front pockets of their jackets, were swaggering along and posturing as they leaned on their varas, a sort of forked stick, or exchanged pleasantries in their boneless Andalusian dialect, which is almost wholly composed of vowels.

The hour for the performance was approaching, and every one was wending his way to the arena, telling wonders of the torero, who, if he went on and escaped being gored, would soon surpass Montès himself, for he seemed to be possessed of the devil.

Andrès and Militona sat down in their box, and the bull-fight commenced.

The famous torero was dressed in black ; his jacket, embroidered with jet and silk, was of a sombre richness



MILITONA

that harmonised with the wearer's grim and almost sinister face. He wore a yellow sash round his thin hips; in his whole frame there were but muscles and bones.

His dark face was marked by two or three wrinkles due to care rather than to age, for though the features were no longer those of a young man, yet maturity had not yet marked them for its own.

Andrès fancied the man's face and figure were familiar to him, yet he could not recollect where he had seen him. But Militona had not had a minute's doubt, and although he was so unlike his former self, she had at once recognised Juancho.

The great change in him in so short a time frightened her, for it was a proof of how terribly that man of bronze and steel had been tortured by his passion for her.

She quickly opened her fan to hide her face and leaned back, whispering to Andrès:—

“It is Juancho.”

But she had not drawn back quickly enough; the torero had caught sight of her and saluted her with a gesture of the hand.

“Why, it is Juancho,” said Andrès. “The poor fellow is terribly changed; he looks ten years older. So



MILITONA

he is the new performer of whom people are talking so much ; he has evidently resumed his profession."

"Let us go, Andrès," said Militona to her husband. "I do not know why, but I feel quite upset, and as if something terrible were about to take place."

"Why, what can take place," replied Andrès, "save that picadores will get upset and horses gored, all of which is in the regular course of things ?"

"I am afraid that Juancho may do some mad thing."

"You are still thinking of that nasty knife-thrust of his. If you knew Latin, I should tell you that I am safe from another of the same sort, in accordance with the rule *non bis in idem*. Besides, the fellow must have had time to cool off."

Juancho performed prodigies. He behaved as if he were invulnerable as an Achilles or a Roland : he took the bulls by the tail and made them spin round ; he put his foot between their horns and leapt over them ; he snatched the colours from their shoulders, planted himself straight in front of them, and indulged with unparalleled audacity in the most dangerous uses of the cloak. The spectators, carried away by enthusiasm, applauded frantically, and every one agreed that such



MILITONA

work had never been seen since the days of the Cid Campeador.

The quadrille of toreros, electrified by his example, appeared not to know what danger was ; the picadores rode right into the centre of the ring ; the banderillos stuck in their darts adorned with paper, without ever missing once, for Juancho seconded every man just at the right moment, by drawing away the fierce brute's attention and attracting it to himself. A chulo had slipped and the bull was just about to gore him, when Juancho drove it back at the peril of his own life.

Every thrust he gave was from upwards down, between the shoulders of the animal, driving the sword in to the hilt, and killing the bulls stone dead, without the cachetero having to end their agony with his dagger.

"By Jupiter !" said Andrès to Militona, "Montès, Chiclanero, Arjona, Labi, and the other fellows had better look out, or Juancho will beat them all, and indeed I think he beats them all now."

But there never again was to be such a performance. Juancho on that occasion attained to the highest summits of his art ; he performed prodigies such as will never again be witnessed. Militona herself could not but applaud him ; Andrès was stamping and applauding

MILITONA

like a madman ; the excitement was at its height, and frantic shouts welcomed Juancho's every move.

The sixth bull was let loose.

Then occurred something extraordinary and unheard-of. Juancho, after having admirably handled the bull and used his muleta in incomparable fashion, took his sword and, instead of driving it into the animal's spine as everybody expected, threw it in the air with such force that it stuck in the ground, whirling and twisting some twenty yards away.

"What is he up to now?" exclaimed every one. "This is not courage, it is madness. What does he mean to do? To kill the bull with a slap of the hand?"

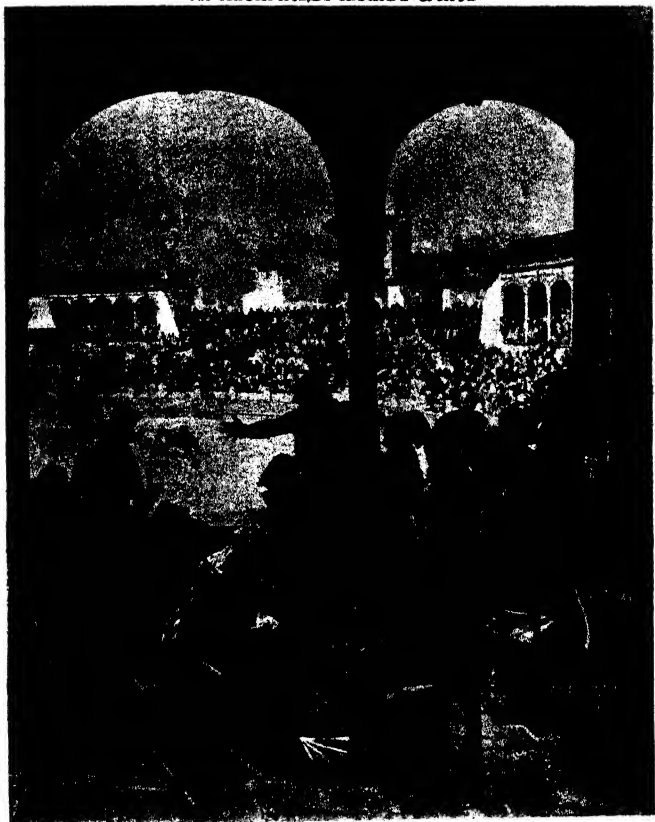
Juancho cast upon the box where sat Militona an ineffable glance in which were summed up all his sufferings and all his love, and remained motionless in front of the bull. The brute lowered its head, and drove its horn clean through the man's breast. It came out red to the root.

A roar of horror, the roar of ten thousand voices, ascended to heaven.

Militona fell back in her seat, pale as the dead. During that one awful minute she had loved Juancho.

A roar of horror, the roar of ten thousand voices ascended to heaven.

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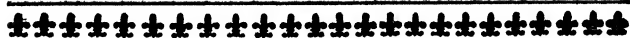


The Nightingales

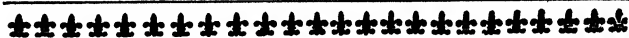
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*But in the mansion lived two fair cousins who ever sang better
than all the birds in the park.*



THE NIGHTINGALES



ROUND the mansion stretched a beautiful park.

In the park itself there were all manner of birds: nightingales, blackbirds, warblers; every bird on earth had come to the place.

In spring it was impossible to hear anything for the singing; every leaf concealed a nest, every tree an orchestra. All the little feathery musicians of the grove rivalled with each other: some twittered, others warbled; some performed trills and pearly cadences, others indulged in fiorituri or sustained notes. Real musicians could not have done better.

But in the mansion lived two fair cousins who together sang better than all the birds in the park. The one was called Fleurette, and the other Isabel. They were both beautiful, attractive, and in the full bloom of their loveliness, and on Sundays, when they had on their handsome dresses, they would have been taken for angels if their snow-white shoulders had not proved them to be maids. All they lacked was wings. When they sang, their old uncle, the lord of Maulevrier, some-



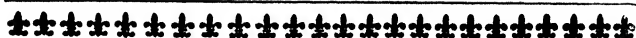
THE NIGHTINGALES

times held their hands, lest they should take a fancy to fly away.

You may imagine what fine deeds were done in honour of Fleurette and Isabel at the jousts and tourneys. Their reputation for beauty and talent had spread throughout Europe, but they were none the prouder on that account. They lived very quietly, seeing scarcely any one save their little page Valentine, a handsome lad with golden hair, and the lord of Maulevrier, an old white-headed man, very much weather-worn and broken down after sixty years' fighting.

They passed their time in giving seed to the little birds, saying their prayers, and rehearsing together a motet, a madrigal, a villanelle, or other music; they also had flowers that they watered and cared for themselves. Their lives were spent in these sweet and poetic maidenly occupations; they kept themselves in the background and troubled not about the world, yet the world was interested in them. Neither the nightingale nor the rose may be hidden; they always betray themselves by their song and their scent. Now the two cousins were both nightingales and roses.

Dukes and princes came and asked them in marriage; the Emperor of Trebizond and the Soldan of



THE NIGHTINGALES

Egypt sent ambassadors to the lord of Maulevrier to proffer their hands, but the two cousins were satisfied to remain single and would have naught to do with any of them. It may be that a secret instinct told them that their mission here on earth was to sing and remain maids, and that they would fail to perform their duty if they did anything else.

They were very, very young when they had first come to the manor. The window of their room looked out upon the park, and they had been lulled to sleep by the song of birds. As soon as they could stand, Blondel, the old minstrel, had placed their tiny hands upon the ivory keys of the virginal; it had been their only plaything, and they had sung before they could speak. They sang just as other people breathe; it came naturally to them.

This education had exercised much influence on their characters. Their harmonious childhood had kept them apart from noisy and talkative children. They had never uttered a shrill cry or a discordant plaint. The musical sense, developed in them at the expense of the other senses, caused them to feel but little whatever did not pertain to music. They lived in a melodious atmosphere, and they were scarcely in touch



THE NIGHTINGALES

with the reality of the world around them save through sounds. They understood clearly the murmur of the foliage, the ripple of the water, the chiming of the clock, the sigh of the wind in the chimney, the buzz of the spinning-wheel, the splashing of the raindrops upon the quivering panes, — in a word, all external and all internal harmonies ; but I must own that they felt no particular enthusiasm about a sunset, and they were as unable to appreciate a painting as if there had been a thick veil over their eyes of blue and of black. They were haunted by music ; they dreamed of it ; they forgot to eat and drink on account of it ; they cared for nothing else on earth. Stay, they did love something else : Valentine and their flowers ; Valentine, because he resembled the roses, and the roses because they resembled Valentine. But this affection was quite in the background. It is true that Valentine was only thirteen. Their greatest delight was to sing in the evening at their window the music they had composed during the day.

The most famous masters came from great distances to hear them and to compete with them, but they had no sooner heard one bar than they broke their instruments, tore up their scores, and acknowledged themselves vanquished. And indeed the music made by the cousins

THE NIGHTINGALES

was so agreeable and melodious that the cherubs came from heaven to the window with the other musicians and learned it in order to sing it to God.

One May evening the two cousins were singing a motet for two voices, and never was a motet composed or rendered better than this one. A nightingale in the park, nestling in a rose-bush, listened to them attentively, and when they had finished, drew near to the window and said to them in its nightingale speech :

“I should like to compete in song with you.”

The two cousins replied that they were willing, and begged him to begin.

The nightingale began. It was a master among nightingales. Its little throat swelled, its wings fluttered, its whole body quivered. It sang roulades that were endless, brilliant bursts, arpeggios, chromatic scales; it went up and down, it prolonged the notes, it gave cadences in pearliest fashion and with incredible clearness; it seemed as though its voice, as well as its body, had wings. Then it stopped, sure that it had won the victory.

The two cousins sang in their turn, and did better than they had ever done. In comparison with theirs the nightingale's song sounded like a sparrow's twittering.

THE NIGHTINGALES

The winged artist tried a last effort. It sang a love song, and then performed a brilliant fanfare, which it crowned with an aigrette of high, vibrant, piercing notes wholly beyond the range of the human voice.

The two cousins, in no wise dismayed by its marvellous performance, turned the page of their music-book, and replied to the nightingale in such fashion that Saint Cecilia, who was listening to them from heaven, turned green with jealousy and let fall her bass-viol.

The nightingale made another attempt at singing, but it was exhausted by the struggle; its breath was gone, its feathers were all fluffed up, and its eyes were closing in spite of all it could do. It was dying.

“You sing better than I do,” it said to the two cousins, “and my vain desire to overcome you is costing me my life. I ask one boon of you; I have a nest; in that nest are three birdlings. It is in the third eglantine bush in the great walk in the direction of the pond. Send and have them fetched, and teach them to sing like you, for I am dying.”

And having thus spoken, the nightingale died. The two cousins mourned over it bitterly, it had sung so well. They called Valentine, the little golden-haired page, and told him where the nest was. Val-



THE NIGHTINGALES

entine, who was a sharp little fellow, easily found the place; he put the nest into his bosom and brought it safely to the house. Fleurette and Isabel, leaning on the balcony, were impatiently awaiting him. Valentine soon came up, holding the nest in his hands. The three nestlings popped their heads up and opened their bills very wide. The maidens felt compassion for these little orphans, and took turns in feeding them. When they had grown somewhat, they began their musical education, as they had promised to the defeated nightingale.

The birdlings became wonderfully tame and sang wonderfully well. They would fly about the room, and perch now on Isabel's head, now on Fleurette's shoulder. They would settle down in front of the music-book, and it really looked as if they could read the notes, so intelligently did they gaze at the minims and crotchets. They had learned every one of Fleurette's and Isabel's airs, and they were themselves beginning to improvise very pretty ones.

The cousins lived more and more retired, and at night sounds of supernatural melody were heard issuing from their room. The nightingales, thoroughly trained, took part in the concert, and sang almost as

THE NIGHTINGALES

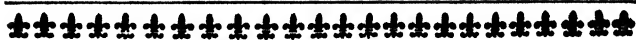
well as their mistresses, who had themselves made great progress.

Their voices acquired day after day extraordinary brilliancy, and rang golden and crystalline far above the register of natural voices. The maidens were visibly wasting away; they had become pale as agates and well-nigh as transparent. The lord of Maulevrier tried to put a stop to their singing, but he never was able to manage it.

No sooner had they sung a few bars than a little red spot would show upon their cheeks and keep spreading until they had finished. Then the spot disappeared, but a cold sweat would wet their skin, and their lips tremble as if they were suffering from fever.

As for their singing, it was more beautiful than ever; there was something in it that was not of this world, and when the mighty, sonorous voices of the two frail young girls were heard, it was not difficult to foresee what would happen, namely, that the music would wreck the instruments.

They themselves realised this, and began to play upon their virginal, which they had forsaken for song. But one night their window was open, the birds were warbling in the park, the breeze was whispering har-



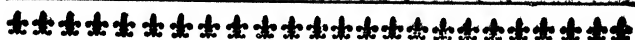
THE NIGHTINGALES

moniously ; the air was so full of music that they could not resist the temptation to sing a duet they had composed the day before.

It was their swan song ; a wondrous song filled with tears, rising to the most inaccessible heights of the scale, and going down the range of notes to the lowest depths. It was sparkling and incredible ; a flood of trills, a fiery rain of chromatic flashes, a musical blaze impossible to describe ; and meanwhile the little red spot grew terribly larger and spread all over their cheeks. The three nightingales watched them and listened to them with strange anxiety ; they beat their wings, they fluttered here and there, they could not keep still. At last the girls got to the last phrase of the composition ; their voices became so weirdly sonorous that it was plain it was no longer living beings who were singing. The nightingales had flown away. The two cousins were dead ; their souls had fled with the last note. The nightingales flew straight to heaven to bear that last song to God, who kept them all three in His Paradise to perform before Him the music composed by the two cousins.

And later, God, out of these three nightingales, made the souls of Palestrina, Cimarosa, and Gluck.

The Marchioness's Lap-Dog



THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG



I

THE MORNING AFTER THE SUPPER

IT is not yet day in Eliante's room, although noon has just struck.

Noon ! The pretty woman's dawn. But Eliante had been asked to supper at the Baroness's, and the party had been an extremely gay one. It is true that Eliante had partaken of little birds, pheasants' eggs in cullis, and other abominations only ; she had barely touched with her rosy lips the foaming champagne, and drunk scarce two fingers of Barbadoes cream, for Eliante, like all ladies of her class, pretends to live on fresh milk and love only. Yet she is more weary than usual, and will see no one before three o'clock.

The Abbé V——, who was of the party, was splendidly extravagant, and the Chevalier played the most

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

novel trick upon the Commander ; the best of the fun being that the Commander could not be brought to see that he had been fooled. In the gray dawn they had all driven down to the keeper's lodge to eat onion soup, in order to whet their appetites, and after breakfast the Chief Justice's lady had brought Eliante home in her carriage, for the latter's coach had not then turned up.

Eliante, feeling rather tired, has just opened half-way her lovely eyes, that are slightly heavy, and a faint smile, turning into a yawn, flits over her little heart-shaped mouth that looks like a rose. She is thinking of the Abbé's absurdities and the Chevalier's impertinences, and of the poor Lady Justice's nose that kept getting redder and redder. Soon, however, these remembrances fade away and give place to one only thought.

For, needs must it be told, coquettish and gallant though the Abbé proved himself, and caddish though the Chevalier was, it was not either of them who carried off the honours of the night.

It was another personage, who said not a word and yet was considered cleverer than both of them, who had not taken any pains with his dress, and yet had been voted the very acme of grace and elegance, who

MORNING AFTER THE SUPPER

had won the suffrages of the whole party. The Abbé himself, jealous though he was of him, was forced to recognise that his merit was beyond the common, and to salute the rising star.

I must not allow you to spend your time in useless conjectures and guesses. This personage, with whom all the ladies were in love, and who fills Eliante's thoughts at this moment, is simply the Marchioness's lap-dog, an incomparable toy poodle brought by her in her wadded muff.

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

II

FANFRELUCHE THE LAP-DOG

IN order to worthily praise this marvellous lap-dog I should have to pluck a pen from Cupid's wing; the hand of the Graces would alone be light enough to draw its portrait, and Latour's pencil would not prove too delicate.

It is called Fanfreluche, which is a very pretty name for a dog, and one that it does honour to.

Fanfreluche is no bigger than its mistress's fist, and everybody knows that the Marchioness has the smallest hand in the world; yet Fanfreluche looks quite large, almost the size of a lamb, for its silky coat is a foot long, and so fine, so soft, so shiny, that pussy's tail looks like a brush in comparison with it. When it gives you a paw, and you press it, you are quite astonished to feel nothing in your hand. Fanfreluche is not so much a dog as a flock of soft silk, in which shine a couple of beautiful brown eyes and a little pink nose. A poodle of that sort can have belonged

FANFRELUCHE THE LAP-DOG

to the Mother of the Loves only, and she must have lost it on her way to Cythera, where her ladyship the Marchioness, who goes there every now and then, must have come upon it.

Pray look at its interesting and bright little face. Would not Roxelane herself have envied the little nose, tip-tilted like a flower, and with a line down the middle as on that of Anne of Austria? And are not those two tan spots above the eyes more effective than any "heart-breaker" patch put on in the most alluring way?

And how vivacious are its prominent eyes! And the double row of white teeth, no larger than grains of rice, which, at the least annoyance, show in all their brilliancy; what duchess but would envy their purity and pearliness? Then, besides its external attractions, darling Fanfreluche possesses innumerable society accomplishments: it dances a minuet more gracefully than Marcel himself; it can give a paw and tell the time; it jumps for the Queen and the royal princesses, and it can tell the right hand from the left. Fanfreluche is very clever, and knows a good deal more than the Academicians themselves. That it is not a member of the Academy is due to its having declined to

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

enter that body, believing, no doubt, that its absence would be the more conspicuous. The Abbé affirms that it knows dead languages better than most people, and that the only reason why it does not speak is that it enjoys the fun of teasing its mistress.

Nor is Fanfreluche voracious, like the common run of dogs. It is very dainty, very choice in its food, and very difficult to please. The only thing it eats is a vol-au-vent with brains, made expressly for it, and all it drinks is a small quantity of cream served in a Japanese porcelain saucer. However, when its mistress is supping out, it condescends to nibble a bit of the wing of a pullet and to toy with a little sweet at dessert. This, be it noted, is a special favour which every one may not receive, and to secure it the cook must be satisfactory to Fanfreluche. The little chap has but one fault — but who is perfect on this earth of ours? — it loves brandied cherries and Spanish snuff, of which it every now and then gobbles up a pinch. It shares this fad with the Prince de Condé.

As soon as it hears the Commander's gold snuff-box being opened, it is worth while to see it rise up on its hind legs and rap on the floor with its tail; and if the Marchioness happens to be deep in the delights of

FANFRELUCHE THE LAP-DOG

whist or reversi, and has taken her eye off her dog, it will spring on to the Abbé's knees and get three or four brandied cherries. The consequence is that Fanfreluche, who has not a strong head, gets drunk as a piper and a couple of lords; it goes staggering around in the most comical fashion, and is ferociously fond of the Chevalier's calves, who, in order to preserve what he has left of them, is compelled to curl himself up in an arm-chair. Under those circumstances, Fanfreluche is no longer a toy poodle, but a raging lion, and the Marchioness alone can make it obey. It is most amusing to see the airs and tricks it indulges in before it will allow itself to be put back in the muff or laid to bed in its rose-wood box lined with white satin, trimmed with blue chenille. And nobody will ever know how many smacks with a busk or a fan the Abbé has got across the fingers on account of the pranks of Fanfreluche, whose accomplice he is.

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

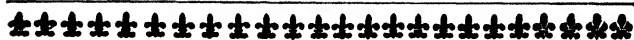
III

A PASTEL BY LATOUR

IF the transition from a pretty dog to a pretty woman be not too abrupt, allow me to make a slight sketch of Eliante for you.

Eliante is unquestionably young; she may safely tell her real age for the next ten years without taking refuge in a fib, for the number of her springtimes is still but small. It is really a case of *aurea mediocritas*. Every one knows where the fragments of her last doll are to be found, and she is so notoriously a *child* that she unhesitatingly undertakes the parts of old women, duennas, and grandmothers in the performances of society proverbs and charades. Happy is Eliante, who has no need to dread being mistaken for the character she impersonates, and who can boldly paint on wrinkles without the risk of the artificial being taken for the natural!

On the other hand, her ladyship the Chief Justice's wife, whose nose is reddening visibly, to the huge



A PASTEL BY LATOUR

delight of her female friends, considers that the parts of young widows of twenty-five are too old for her.

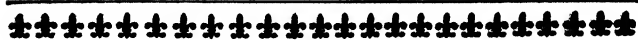
Eliante, who is of good birth and moves in the best of society only, was fifteen when she married Count de —; she had left the convent and had never seen her intended, who appeared to her to be very handsome and amiable. He happened to be the one and only man she had yet seen, aside from her confessor. Besides, to her, marriage meant nothing but a coach, new gowns, and diamonds.

The Count is well over forty; in the reign of the late King, he was what is called a roué, a lady-killer, a rake. He is most amiable to his wife, but as he had another affair on hand, a formal connection, he has never been seriously intimate with Eliante, and the young Countess enjoys the utmost liberty, for the Count is not in the least inclined to jealousy or other barbarous vices.

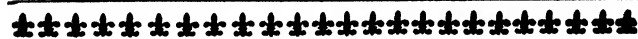
Eliante has not the Greek regularity of features, which every one declares to be the perfection of beauty, but which, in reality, charms no one. She has the loveliest eyes in the world and knows how to use them to the greatest advantage; delicately drawn eyebrows

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

that look like Cupid's bow; a pert little nose; the tiniest of mouths; and, in addition, such a mass of hair and so long that when it is undone it falls down to her knees; such perfect, well set, white teeth that they would force grief to smile in order to give them a chance to show themselves; hands both slender and plump; and a foot that would fit into Cinderella's slipper, — the whole forming a fairly agreeable combination. There is one thing only that is large in all Eliante's dainty perfection: it is her eyes. Her chief charm lies in her extreme grace and the way she sets off even the simplest dresses. Full court dress suits her wonderfully, but a *négligé* is even more becoming to her.



THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG



IV

POMPADOUR

ELIANTE is resting on her elbow, that sinks partly into a pillow of the finest Holland linen, trimmed with English point lace. She is thinking of Fanfreluche's unequalled perfection, and sighs as she reflects upon the Marchioness's luck. Eliante would willingly give three musketeers and a couple of society abbés in exchange for the unequalled poodle.

While she is dreaming, let us cast a glance at her bedroom; the more so that I shall not soon have another opportunity of describing a pretty woman's room of that time, and that the Pompadour style is now all the rage.

The bedstead of carved wood, painted white, picked out with mat gold and burnished gold, rests upon four ingeniously turned feet. The arched head-board, surmounted by a group of doves cooing and billing, is carefully upholstered, so that the fair sleeper shall not



POMPADOUR

run the risk of hurting her head if she has too vivid dreams in which illusion closely resembles reality. The dais, ornamented with four large plumes of feathers, and hung from the roof by a gilded cord, supports a double pair of curtains made of watered silver stuff of the colour called nymph's thigh. In the foot-board, in a frame festooned with delicately carved roses and daisies, is set a large mirror, which reflects the Countess's graceful attitudes, and usefully betrays her charms by showing what must not be shown. Besides it brightens and lights up this somewhat dark part. Eliante is so made that she does not need to enshroud herself in prudent mystery; she has no need for dim lighting and softened hues.

Upon a small table quivers, in a night-lamp of old Sèvres china, a little shy star, which has been robbed of its nocturnal aureole by the joyous beams of the sun that are filtering in between the cracks of the shutters and the parting of the curtains, for the maids had taken it for granted that her ladyship would return early, and the preparations for her night's rest had been made as usual.

The panels above the doors, done in tender lilac camaïeu, represent mythological and amorous scenes.

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

The painter has displayed much warmth and voluptuousness in these compositions, which, thanks to the pleasant easy way in which they are painted, would inspire the most rigid and stand-off prude with gay and erotic fancies.

The hangings, which are of the same stuff and colour as the curtains of the bed, are fastened by silver loops, cords, and knots. One of the advantages of these hangings is that they cause any woman who has not, like Eliante, a complexion that can stand anything, to look frightful and red as a fury. The young Countess wickedly chose that particular shade in order to vex a couple of her best friends who, through overmuch rouging, have turned the colour of quince, and whom she insists on always receiving in this room.

Mirrors in rocaille frames fill the bays between the windows. There never can be too many mirrors in a pretty woman's room, but I should willingly smash those which have to reflect ugly faces. Is it not sufficient to see the Chief Justice's lady and the old dowager de B — one single time?

The mantelpiece is covered with Chinese figures, statuettes in Parian and Dresden porcelain. Two tall vases of green céladon craquelé, richly mounted, stand

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

at either end. A superb clock by Boulle, inlaid with tortoise-shell, and the hands of which are on their way to three o'clock, rests upon an equally superb base, adorned with golden foliage. In front of the fireplace, in which is burning a bright fire, a silver filigree fire-screen forms a number of sharp angles. Screens of damask in carved wood frames, a duchess, and an embroidery frame complete the furniture in this part.

A tall screen, in real China lacquer, covered with herons with lofty aigrettes, winged dragons, palm-trees, and fishermen with cormorants on their fists, prevents draughts from making their way into this sanctuary of the Graces, while a Turkey carpet, brought to Paris by the Count, who was formerly ambassador to the Sublime Porte, deadens the sound of steps, and double-lined shutters keep all external noise out of this asylum of rest and love. Such was the Countess Eliante's bedroom.

I hope that in these days of auctioneer literature, I may be forgiven this somewhat lengthy description, especially if it be borne in mind that I might easily have made it twice as long, and that I could not have been sent to jail in consequence.

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

V

POURPARLERS

FANCHONETTE, the Countess's maid, enters on tip-toe, advances cautiously towards the bed, and seeing that *Eliante* is not asleep, —

Your ladyship —

Eliante. Well, Fanchonette, what is the matter? Is the house on fire? You look quite frightened.

Fanchonette. No, your ladyship, the house is not on fire; it is worse than that; Duke Alcindor has been waiting for two hours past, and wants to come in.

Eliante. Tell him that I cannot see him; tell him that I have the megrims; that I am not at home.

Fanchonette. I have done so already, but he will not go away. He says that if you are not in, you will have to come in; and that if you are in, you will have to go out by and by. He insists on blockading your door.

Eliante. What a dreadful man!

Fanchonette. He is going to have a tent and provisions brought, and to settle down in your ladyship's

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

drawing-room. He is so anxious to talk to you that he will, if need be, climb in by the window.

Eliante. What an odd notion ! The man is out of his senses. I wonder what he can have to say to me. Fanchonette, how do I look to-day ? I seem to be dreadfully ugly ; I feel as if I looked like Lady B——.

Fanchonette. On the contrary ; your ladyship never looked better. You ladyship's complexion is blooming.

Eliante. Well, tidy up my head-dress, and tell the Duke that I consent to see him.

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

VI

ELIANTE'S BEDSIDE

ELIANTE, DUKE ALCINDOR.

*A*LCINDOR. Incomparable Eliante, you behold the most humble of your subjects, who has been driven to the harsh necessity of being importunate by the great desire he felt to lay his homage at the feet of your throne.

Eliante. I would have you observe, Duke, that I am in bed and not on a throne, and at the same time I must ask you to forgive me for not rising to receive you.

Alcindor. Is not the bed the pretty woman's throne? And as regards not rising to receive me, I must be allowed to look upon it as a favour.

Eliante. Now I come to think of it, I forbid you, Alcindor, to look upon the fact of your being admitted to my bedside as a favour. You are so punctilious that one must be on one's guard with you.

Alcindor. That is hard of you: you have always been most ignobly virtuous with me, and yet Heaven

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

is my witness that I burn for you with the liveliest flame. You make me feel —

Eliante. Alcindor, when you want to talk of your flame, put some fire in your eye and try to speak less coldly. You really look afraid that I might believe you.

Alcindor. What dreadful things you say, Eliante. One tenth of that would be enough to destroy a man's reputation. Happily I have nothing to fear in that respect. I shall show you —

Eliante. I do not want to be shown.

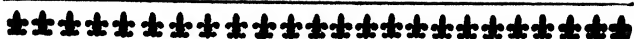
Alcindor, picking up a book on the table. What is this? Another new book? A piece of farrago, I suppose. Authors are really a nuisance. Do you receive such fellows?

Eliante. Not I. But I have a couple of poets who sleep in the stables and eat with the servants. They send me in that stuff by Fanchonette, whom they call Iris and Venus.

Alcindor, coming close to the bed. I must say nightcaps are strikingly becoming to you, and you are bewitching in your wrapper.

Eliante. I am not; I am ugly as sin.

Alcindor. I most humbly beg your pardon for contradicting you, but that is absolutely false. Even if I



ELIANTE'S BEDSIDE

have to fight a duel with you on the subject, I shall not retract.

Eliante. I am sure I look like a fright. I never closed my eyes once.

Alcindor. You are as blooming as a devotee or a boarding-school miss. Your eyes seem to me singularly bright. Were you at the Baroness's little supper party? I am told that it was perfect of its kind. The Abbé, in particular, was in great form. I am grieved to the heart that I could not accept the dear Baroness's invitation, but one cannot be everywhere. You would never believe how many horses I founder; my best one is done out, and I do not know how I stand it myself. Ah! so you were at the supper? On my honour, I shall go hang myself when I leave you.

Eliante. The Marchioness was there with a little dog I had never seen her with before. A toy poodle of the very best breed; I have never seen anything like it. Its name is Fanfreluche. It is such a love of a dog! Why were you so anxious to see me, Duke?

Alcindor. Because I wanted to see you. Is not that a very good reason?

Eliante. Very good indeed. But had you nothing more important to tell me?

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

Alcindor. Why, I wanted to formally declare my love for you, and to establish myself as a permanent suitor of your perfection.

Eliante. You are talking nonsense, Duke. You know as well as I do that you are not the least little bit in love.

Alcindor. Ah ! fairest Eliante, the truth is that my heart is pierced through and through. If you will only look at my back you will see the barb of the arrow sticking out.

Eliante. The loveliest little face ; long silky hair, tan spots, bandy legs. I do believe I shall go crazy if I do not have just such another poodle. But there is not another like it.

Alcindor. Seriously, now, I love you.

Eliante. Its little tail sticking up.

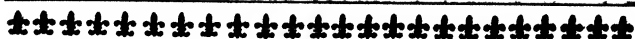
Alcindor. I adore you.

Eliante. Its ears so curly.

Alcindor. You are divine.

Eliante. Oh, the lovely little creature ! The Abbé says it can talk Hebrew. Oh, I am so unhappy ! It dances so prettily. I hate the Marchioness ; she is a mean thing, and wears false hair.

Alcindor. What can I do to console you ? Shall I



ELIANTE'S BEDSIDE

cross the seas, or jump on to the towers of Notre-Dame? I can do it: you have only to give the order.

Eliante. I want nothing but Fanfreluche. In all my life I have had but one overmastering desire, and I cannot gratify it. I think I shall have vapours; my nerves are going already. Pass me the General Lamothe drops, Duke. Look, in that vial on the table. I feel faint.

Alcindor, putting the vial to her nose. What a superb ruffle you have on. It is Malines or Brussels point lace, if I am not mistaken.

Eliante. You annoy me beyond endurance, Alcindor. Stop, now. Ah! I would willingly kiss the devil, or my husband, for the matter of that, if he were to walk in with Fanfreluche under his arm.

Alcindor. You would, would you? And if it were I that came in with the dog, would I be treated worse than the devil or your husband?

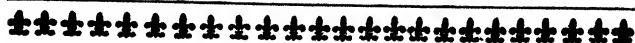
Eliante. No; rather better, perhaps. I say no more. Ring for Fanchonette to come and dress me.

Alcindor. I obey you, Madam. I' faith, the die is cast. I am going to turn dog-stealer. Forgive me, O my ancestors. Jupiter turned himself into a goose

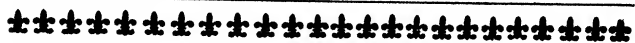
THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

and a bull, which was coming down a good deal more. Love enjoys reducing the haughtiest hearts to such harsh extremities. Farewell, Madam. I go in quest of the Golden Fleece.

Eliante. Farewell. May Cupid and Mercury assist you. And when you return, be sure to have Fanfre-luche with you, or I shall receive you as would a Hyrcanian tigress, with all my claws and teeth out. Here is Fanchonette : good-bye, Duke.



THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG



VII

ALCINDOR

ALCINDOR, having returned home, threw himself into an easy-chair, and sighed in a soft and melodious fashion that meant: "The devil fly away with all affected and hysterical prudes and their absurd fancies!"

He leaned back, gazed fixedly at the mouldings on the ceiling, and languidly stretched his hand out towards the watered-silk bell-pull. He rang several times, but no one came. Alcindor being naturally very short-tempered and impatient of any delay, hung on the bell-pull with both hands and broke it. Having thus deprived himself of the means of communicating with his people in the antechamber and the offices, and determined not to leave his chair, he began making a terrific row.

"Here! Giroflée, Similor, Marmelade, Galopin, Champagne! Where the devil are you all? There is not a man of rank in France so ill-served as I am. Here!"

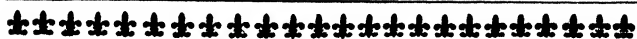
THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

you rascals, fools, idiots, scoundrels, villains! You shall each of you be thrashed within an inch of your lives! Let the first one to come in look out for himself! Here! you black and white rabble, I shall have you all sent to the galleys, hanged, or broken on the wheel, for you deserve it. I shall take care to commend you particularly to the provost, you may be sure. Damn you! blast you! curse you! a plague upon you! The scoundrels will make me forget myself! Champagne, Basque, Galopin; Similor, Marmelade, Giroflée! Here, I say! The confounded brutes! I can no more; I am dying! Ouf!”

And Duke Alcindor, choking with rage and a fresh lot of invectives that stuck in his throat, fell exhausted in his chair.

At last the door opened and gave admission to a big, round, chubby negro face, the chubbier for its mouth being filled with quail, stolen from the pantry, the swallowing of which had been interrupted by the mad shouts of Alcindor. This was Similor, the Duke's favourite negro servant, and behind him showed timidly Giroflée's sharp nose.

“Did white master call black man?” inquired Similor, the negro, in wheedling tones that betrayed his



ALCINDOR

terror, as with difficulty he made his tongue work through the great mass of bread and meat in his mouth.

“Did I call you, you villain? I’ll have you skinned alive and turned inside out like an old coat, to see if the lining of your skin is as black as the stuff it is made of. There! you scoundrel!”

And the Duke, whose wrath blazed up again as he gave vent to it, seized a candlestick on the table and hurled it at the negro’s head. But the candlestick struck, instead, one of the mirrors and smashed it to flinders.

Similor, who was well used to his master’s ways, let himself fall flat on his stomach, howling plaintively: “Oh! oh! oh! I am killed! Oh! dear master! I am killed! The candlestick has gone clean through me! I can feel the big hole! I am dead for sure this time! Wow! Wow!”

And he made the most comical faces, for he knew that these rarely failed to prove effective.

“Come, you hound,” said Alcindor, his anger passed and landing a kick on the negro’s posterior, “be done with your fooling. And you, Giroflée, since you are here at last, make me comfortable, for I shall not go

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

out again to-day. Prepare me for bed, Giroflée, and you, Similor, tell the porter that I am at home to no one. Stay; if a lady in a black hood, with small feet and white hands, should call, show her up. But for heaven's sake, let him not make a mistake and admit Elmire or Zulmé, two creatures I am sick of and that I tired of a week ago."

Then Duke Alcindor stretched himself out in an easy-chair and Giroflée began to make his toilet. Similor stood in front of him, holding out pins when necessary, putting out his tongue, making faces, and pulling the monkey's tail, causing it to mow and chatter every time.

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

VIII
PERPLEXITY

I MUST confess that although Duke Alcindor had two hundred thousand a year, a shapely leg and very fine teeth, he was absolutely lacking in resourcefulness. This was not apparent at first sight, for he had plenty of talk and polish, to say nothing of the assurance of a man who is well made, has two hundred thousand a year in real estate, a great name, a fine title, and the expectation of being ere long made a grandee of Spain. Under those circumstances it is easy to understand how it was the Duke passed, in a certain set, for an extremely brilliant man, but under his fine exterior he was in reality very much of a fool.

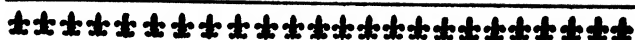
Alcindor, who believed it was his duty to become the Countess Eliante's lover, since she was all the rage, and naturally women who are all the rage are the prey of fashionable men, had at first been delighted that the only condition he had to fulfil in order to

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

be happy should be the gift of Fanfreluche to the Countess.

He had dreaded above all having to submit to all the annoyances of a regular intrigue and of the state of a declared pretender, and had feared that Eliante, with a view to making her own triumph all the more conspicuous, would spare him none of the customary gradations which the progress of enlightenment has markedly diminished in number since the days of our barbarous ancestors, but which even now may consume a whole week when the divinity adored has a fancy for posing as a woman with lofty principles and a strong sense of duty.

Besides, the Chevalier de Versac, a rival detested by Alcindor on account of his elegant self-conceit, the good taste of his equipages, the richness and the number of his snuff-boxes, and his watches, had been Eliante's lover before him. Indeed, he was reported to have taken precedence of all the others. It was this fact that had led Alcindor to seek to win Eliante and caused him to pay her marked attentions. But while Eliante had always received him favourably enough, his suit had not appeared likely to be very speedily crowned with success, until the moment when



PERPLEXITY

the lady had given him almost positive reason to hope when speaking of Fanfreluche the poodle.

A pretty woman in exchange for a pretty dog ! At first blush, Duke Alcindor had thought he was getting by far the best of the bargain, for it seemed the easiest thing in the world to get hold of Fanfreluche. In reality, however, nothing was more difficult. The golden apples of the garden of the Hesperides were easy to secure in comparison, and a bushel of them could have been obtained with less difficulty than a single hair from Fanfreluche's silky coat.

How was he to get at it ? He might ask the Marchioness to give it to him, but she would sooner part with her rouge and her diamonds. As for stealing it, she always carried it in her muff, so the poor Duke did not know which way to turn, and was utterly perplexed.

“ Hang it all, I had rather have to do with a courtesan ! There is no place like the Opera for easy loves ; the girls there have common-sense and do not indulge in eccentric fancies. What they want is hard cash or its equivalent. With a few diamonds, silver plate, a coach, or some such trifle, one can get any of them. But the idiocy of wanting the particular poodle that

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

belongs to the Marchioness! I am quite willing to present her, in return for her priceless favours, with a whole pack of toy dogs just as handsome as Fanfreluche. But no, sir; she will have none other than that little beast. It is not, either, as if I were very much in love with her; there is nothing fine about her but her eyes and her teeth; she is thin; her charm lies mainly in her manner and her style. Personally I prefer Rosina Desobry, but I owe it to my reputation to possess and show off Eliante, for I am reproached with seeking the easiest love affairs, and some of my envious friends, de Versac first and foremost, have bruited it abroad that I lack perseverance to overcome really important difficulties. I am bound, therefore, to get Eliante, but to do that I must first get Fanfreluche. What a devil of a notion it is to make a duke and peer turn dog-stealer."

"If your Grace keeps moving about so much, I shall never be able to dress your Grace's hair," said Giroflée timidly.

"Giroflée, you who are my valet, and you, Similor, who are my favourite blackamoor, I will confess to you that you are attending upon a duke who is in a great quandary."



PERPLEXITY

“What is the trouble, my lord Duke?” returned Giroflée, as he curled the last ringlet. “What can possibly trouble such a person as your Grace?”

“You fancy, you low-born fellows, that a duke and peer is above other mortals; it is true that he is, but that does not prevent my being unable to decide what I am to do in my present fix. O Giroflée! O Similor, you behold your beloved master strangely perplexed.”

“If your Grace deigned to confide in me,” said Giroflée, laying his hand on his heart.

“To confide in us,” broke in Similor, who was eager to obtain the information in view of the profits he would certainly derive from it.

“And tell me —” went on Giroflée.

“And tell us —” again put in Similor.

“— what is troubling your Grace.”

Similor, having, as he believed, made clear his interest in the confidence, and aware that he was not nearly as great an orator as Giroflée, allowed the latter to proceed undisturbed.

“I might be of some use to your Grace and suggest something. I seize the opportunity of affirming that I am devoted to your Grace, and I may say that if I could be of any service to my lord Duke, I should

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

unhesitatingly expose my life in endeavouring to do so."

"We would," added the silent Similor, who was bound to maintain the duality, and was annoyed by the too frequent use of "I" by Giroflée.

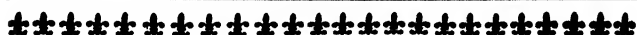
"Thanks, thanks, my children; you move me deeply. Do not pursue the subject. Briefly here is the trouble: Fanfreluche, the Marchioness's lap-dog has to be stolen. If you do the business within the week, you shall have fifty louis, but twenty-five only if you take a fortnight to it."

Giroflée turned pale with joy, and Similor turned a summersault; for stealing, to these two accomplished rascals, was a mere bagatelle. Indeed, Similor, who was a conscientious rogue, said to his master:—

"My lord Duke, we can steal something else into the bargain, if your Grace desires it."

"Look here, you rascals; steal the dog and the dog only,—if you do not want to be soundly thrashed," added the Duke paternally. "Similor, you are too zealous."

Giroflée, who was consummately prudent, took care to obtain from the Duke one half of the promised amount, remarking that money is the sinews of war,



PERPLEXITY

and that one must have it even to steal. The Duke, whose belief in Giroflée's probity was by no means unbounded, at first turned a deaf ear to him, but ended by consenting to give the twenty-five louis. Giroflée, in order to soothe him, made out a wonderfully detailed estimate which went to show that the Duke was actually in pocket by the transaction.

Giroflée's Estimate

"Ten louis for the purchase of a déshabillé, pigeon-breast colour, for Mlle. Beauveau, the Marchioness's maid, who has charge of Fanfreluche the lap-dog, with a view to make her look favourably upon Giroflée, and to facilitate his access to the house.

"Ten louis to be spent in making the porter drunk and gaining his confidence, so that he may raise no objections to the exit of the aforesaid Fanfreluche in Giroflée's company.

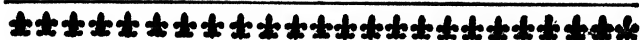
"One louis for biscuits, cracknels, caramel, almonds, burnt almonds, and other sweets destined to excite the appetite and to corrupt the probity of the lap-dog.

"Plus four louis for a little female pug, which would be of considerable assistance to Giroflée in his plans for the seduction of the lap-dog."

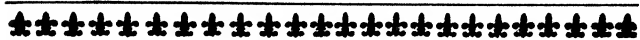
THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

The scrupulous valet had not included in this estimate the value of his own time, nor his physical and moral trouble, seeing that what he was undertaking was done from sheer love of the Duke, for whom he would willingly have risked going to the galleys. Alcindor, touched by such devotion, acknowledged that the estimate was a very reasonable one.

Similor and Giroflée, having divided the twenty-five louis between them, started off on their expedition with such incredible ardour that they had barely reached the corner of the street when they felt so thirsty that they had perforce to enter a tavern in order to refresh themselves by drinking a bottle or two of wine. Their thirst, however, could not be so easily quenched, and they found themselves compelled to call for two other bottles, and so on until the following morning; so that when they emerged from that place of delights their legs were rather shaky. This did not prevent their proceeding to put in some more time in another pot-house not twenty yards away, where they stayed until their money was almost all gone. Then they repaired to the Pont-Neuf, where they purchased a poodle, fairly like Fanfreluche, which cost them a couple of francs, and which they bore triumphantly to Duke Alcindor.



THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG



IX

THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE

ALCINDOR was immensely pleased with the swift work done by Similor and Giroflée, thanks to which he was at last in possession of the precious lap-dog that turned the heads of so many pretty women, the exquisite Fanfreluche that had caused the Abbé de V——'s star to pale, the delicate and curious creature of which the Marchioness was prouder than of her cream-coloured horses, her six-foot-six groom, and her postilion, — so small that she could have put him in her pocket, — and which she was fonder of than of her lovers, her husband, her children — than whist or reversi. How delighted Eliante would be when he presented her with the dear little fellow in a silk-lined basket, covered with rose favours ! What languorous glances, what killing looks, what adorable smiles would be addressed to the happy Alcindor until the time, no doubt very near, when the cup of his bliss would be full !

“ It will make Versac burst with rage,” said Alcindor

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

to himself as he snapped his fingers for joy. "In spite of his affected indifference, I suspect he is still very much in love with the Countess and has a secret intrigue with her."

In order to lose no time, the Duke resolved to carry the supposed Fanfreluche — for he had not the least idea that it was a substitute — to the young beauty that very evening. The innocent looks of Giroflée and Similor averted any suspicion, and Alcindor was far from suspecting that the animal for which he had paid twenty-five louis had really cost but a couple of francs. The resemblance between the two pets was perfect: bandy legs, tip-tilted nose, spots over the eyes, tail sticking up; two drops of water, two eggs could not be more alike. Happily Alcindor did not think of making Fanfreluche's double perform a minuet; the Pont-Neuf dog, entirely unacquainted with the fine manners of society, would have betrayed itself by its awkwardness and inexperience.

Desirous of sustaining comparison with Fanfreluche worthily, Alcindor took extraordinary pains with his dress. He wore a coat of cloth of gold, lined with cloth of silver, with diamond buttons so arranged that each button formed one of the letters of his name; a Venetian

THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE

lace ruffle worth a thousand crowns, and handsomely spotted with a few grains of Spanish snuff, spread majestically on his breast through the opened reddish-brown velvet vest; his legs, encased in white silk stockings, with gold clockings, were remarkable for the elegant roundness of the calf and the aristocratic slenderness of the ankles, while his naturally small feet were compressed in red-heeled shoes. A frail whale-bone rapier, in a white velvet sheath, with a diamond studded hilt, the point up, the hilt down, saucily perked up the tail of his coat. As for his breeches, I regret that I have not been able to ascertain for a certainty of what stuff they were made, though I have reason to believe they were of pearl-gray velvet; but I would not swear to it.

When Giroflée had finished removing with an ivory knife the powder clinging to the Duke's forehead, he was filled with exceeding pride at seeing his master so well dressed, and hastened to fetch a mirror, which he placed before the Duke.

"Your Grace, I am satisfied with my handiwork; your Grace never looked better and will assuredly find no woman hard-hearted enough to resist him this evening."

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

"His lordship would be handsomer still if his lordship's face were painted black, but his Grace will do very well so," added Similor, ever careful to retain the favour he enjoyed, and not to allow the astute Giroflée to surpass him in flattery.

"Call Marmelade, Similor," said the Duke.

Marmelade, a very tall negro, appeared.

"Have the carriage brought round."

When the carriage was at the door, the Duke went down, humming an air, and carrying the sham Fanfreluche, in perfect innocence, in a small basket slung round his neck.

The Duke's equipage was in the best of taste and turned out in conformity with the latest decrees of fashion; he had a huge coachman, with grog-blossoms on his nose, dead drunk, periwigged, wearing a huge bouquet, white gloves, white reins, and a vast fur cape; footmen of most insolent mien, bearing wax torches, two of them in front and three behind, in accordance with the strictest rules. The carriage itself was carved and gilded, the Duke's coat of arms was painted on the panels, and the whole vehicle was of regal magnificence. Four tall light chestnut Mecklenburgh horses, their manes plaited and their tails

THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE

knotted with bows of the Duke's colours, drew the huge machine.

Alcindor, enchanted with himself and full of the most flattering hopes, ordered the coachman to whip up his horses and to go at full speed. The Jehu, who was quite willing to drive at a breakneck pace, and who would not have yielded the crown of the causeway to anybody, even if he had to push past the equipage of a prince of the blood,—so full was he of the importance of his position,—drove his animals at a hard gallop, spite of the shouts of the bourgeois and other contemptible pedestrians, whom he took pleasure in covering with mud.

The Duke went upstairs and had himself announced as “Il Signor Fanfrelucio and Duke Alcindor.” Although Eliante was not visible, for she was dressing for the Opera, Fanfreluche's magic name, like the “Open, Sesame!” in Arabian tales, caused every door to fly open and every order to be disregarded.

When Eliante saw in the basket the Duke had slung round his neck the sham Fanfreluche sitting up and nosing around with a restless look, she uttered a shrill little cry, and clapping her hands with delight, ran to the Duke and said to him : “Alcindor, you are a darling!”

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

Then she caught hold of the lap-dog, quite bewildered by so much honour, and kissed it very tenderly between the eyes.

Alcindor was not surprised at the preference the Countess exhibited in favour of the dog, and patiently waited for his turn. I had forgotten to say that Eliante had risen so abruptly that her cambric wrapper had become disarranged, so that Alcindor noted with satisfaction he had yielded to a burst of ill-temper, and that Eliante possessed other beauties than her eyes and her teeth.

“Madam,” said Alcindor sweetly, “I am neither the devil nor your husband, but merely a man who adores you. Here is Fanfreluche; pray remember your promise.”

Eliante gave Duke Alcindor a good, hearty kiss, but you know that in the matter of kisses, when a pretty woman bestows them, every man is bound to show himself generous and to refuse to keep what has been given him; so Alcindor, who was no miser, gave Eliante back her kiss, largely revised and added to. Fortunately Fanchonette came in just in time.

“Be kind enough to stand for a minute behind that screen, and as soon as I have got my corset on, you shall be summoned.”

THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE

"You may come now, sir," said Fanchonette, presently.

Eliante had her hair powdered, two love-locks hanging down either side of her face, the rest of her hair dressed porcupine fashion on top of her head, the seven bristles well-marked, and soft crimps admirably setting off her blooming face. White feathers put on crossways gave her a most provoking and saucy look. In a word, she looked uncommonly well.

Her gown was put on, the hoops were eight yards wide, and the petticoat was caught up with diamond knots and butterflies. The skirt, of watered silk, of the softest tea-rose hue, fell in full rich folds from her wasp-like waist. Her bodice, half closed by bars of ribbons, allowed a glimpse of beauties worthy of princes and of gods. She wore neither necklace nor cord of diamonds, for she was well aware that no one would look at the gems for her neck, and that everybody would cry out against concealing any part of it. Her sole ornament was a little natural pompon rose that bloomed at the entrance to the fair paradise. Her shoes, of the same material as her dress, might have been worn by a Chinese woman.

"I have a spare seat in my box, Duke," said Eliante ;

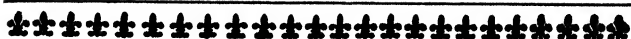
THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

“and afterwards you may bring me home,” she added with a smile.

Duke Alcindor bowed respectfully; Eliante took the sham Fanfreluche in her muff, and they drove off to the Opera.

A ballet by a fashionable composer was being performed. The place was crowded; from the lowest to the highest tier of boxes every seat was taken. The composer of the ballet excelled in rendering the sentiment of love by a succession of poses most voluptuous in themselves, though he never overstepped the bounds of decency. The violence of the feeling that masters gods as well as men was expressed by steps full of passion, and ardent attitudes copied from nature. The graceful Batylle and the sparkling Euphrosina were applauded as they deserved to be, that is, to the echo. In vain did old connoisseurs in the orchestra sound the praises of the noble grace and the majestic poses of the dancer who had formerly been the star; the young fellows called them dotards and refused to listen.

Alcindor, wholly taken up with Eliante, paid but slight attention to the performance on the stage, while Eliante herself was filled with delight at owning Fanfreluche, and exulted at the thought of the Mar-



THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE

chioness's despair at being deprived of her beloved lap-dog.

Yet the setting of the stage was very beautiful and merited more attentive spectators. It represented the grotto of the god of the waters, with madrepores, corals, shells, and mother-of-pearl imitated in the most perfect manner and remarkably brilliant ; a fairy palace beyond all that fairy tales have of most opulent and marvellous, and pretty girls coming down from above in admirably managed scenic effects. But Alcindor was taken up with Eliante, and Eliante with Fanfreluche, and also a little bit with Alcindor, whose figure and rich dress had particularly struck her that evening.

As for the sham Fanfreluche, it looked very unhappy ; unaccustomed to such fine company, it rested its front paws upon the rail of the box and looked round with bewildered glances.

Suddenly a most unexpected effect was produced. The door of a box opened noisily, and a lady, brilliant with gems, her dress cut very low, and rouged like a princess, in a beautiful gown that she wore to great advantage, entered and sat down with two or three young noblemen. It was the Marchioness. A little dog put its head out of her muff, and rested its paws

THE MARCHIONESS'S LAP-DOG

upon the front of the box with an impudent air worthy of a duke and peer. It was Fanfreluche, the one and only Fanfreluche.

Eliante saw it, oh, cruel fate ! She cast upon the astounded Duke a glance charged with lightnings, then, overcome by emotion, fainted away. She was taken home, and it was more than an hour before she came to herself, for neither English salts, nor the General Lamothe drops, nor Carmelite water, nor Queen of Hungary water, nor burned feathers held to her nose succeeded in bringing her to, and if the suggestion to dash water in her face had not suddenly recalled her to life, it might have been supposed that she was actually dead.

As for Alcindor, he was inconsolable. For Eliante refused to see him, and he tried to assuage his grief by having Giroflée and Similor thrashed twice a day. That was the sole reason why he did not kick them both out.

Yet it is said that a few days later he received the following note from Eliante :

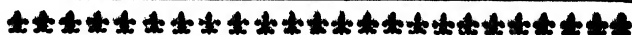
“MY DEAR DUKE, — I thought you had deliberately deceived me, but I have since learned that you

THE SHAM FANFRELUCHE

were yourself deceived by Giroflée and Similor. The dog you gave me is quite clever and only needs training to eclipse Fanfreluche. You dance divinely ; will you not teach it ? Good-bye. ALCINDOR."

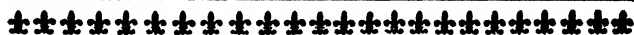
A couple of months later, Pistache, the lap-dog, younger, more active, and more graceful, completely outshone Fanfreluche, the other lap-dog, and Alcindor presented the Chevalier de Versac, who objected to any one poaching on his preserves, with a very fine sword-thrust. Versac never recovered the ground he thus lost, and Alcindor became the uncontested leader of fashion.

Omphale



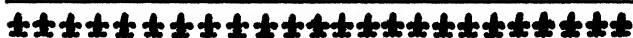
OMPHALE

A ROCOCO STORY



MY uncle, the Chevalier de —, lived in a small house looking out on the one side upon the gloomy Rue des Tournelles, and on the other upon the gloomy Boulevard Saint-Antoine. Between the boulevard and the main building, some remnants of old quickset hedges, fallen a prey to lichens and insects, raised piteously their withered boughs at the bottom of a sort of well enclosed between high sombre walls. A number of starved flowers languidly hung their heads like maidens dying of consumption, and waited for a sunbeam to dry their half-rotted leaves. The walks had been invaded by the grass, and it was so long since they had been raked that it was difficult to make them out. One or two gold fish swam, or floated rather, in a pond covered with water-lentils and marsh plants.

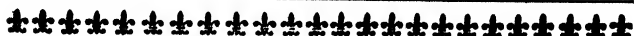
This was what my uncle called his garden.



OMPHALE

Now in this garden of my uncle's, besides the lovely things I have described, there was a very melancholy building to which, for the sake of antithesis, no doubt, he had given the name of "Heart's Delight." It was in a thoroughly ruinous condition; the walls bulged outwards; great pieces of plastering had fallen away and lay on the ground among the nettles and wild oats; the wood-work of the doors and shutters had warped, and neither doors nor windows closed properly. A sort of big pot with radiating effluvia escaping from it adorned the main entrance, for in the days of Louis XV. when Heart's Delight was built, care was always taken to provide two entrances. The cornice, much damaged by the filtration of rain water, was overladen with ova, acanthus leaves, and volutes. In a word, my uncle's Heart's Delight was as sorry a building as one could see.

This poor recent ruin, which was in as bad condition as if it had been a thousand years old, a plaster, and not a stone ruin, wrinkled, cracked, leprous, moss-eaten and covered with efflorescent saltpetre, looked like a man old before his time, who has worn himself out by filthy debauch. It inspired no respect, for there is nothing on earth so ugly and wretched as an old gauze gown or



A ROCOCO STORY

an old plastered wall, both things that have no right to last, yet do keep on lasting.

It was in that building my uncle had installed me.

The interior, though better preserved than the exterior, was just as rococo. The bed hangings were of yellow silk damask with a pattern of great white flowers. A shell-work clock rested on a base inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory. A wreath of Burgundy roses wound coquettishly round a Venetian mirror, and above the doors were painted in camaïeu panels representing the four seasons. A beautiful lady, her hair powdered white, wearing a sky-blue bodice with bars of ribbons of the same hue, a bow in her right hand, a partridge in her left, a crescent on her brow, and a greyhound at her feet, spread herself and smiled most graciously in a large oval frame. It was a former mistress of my uncle's, whom he had painted in the character of Diana. The furniture, it will be seen, was anything but modern; it was the easiest thing in the world to fancy one's self back in the days of the Regency, especially as the tapestry on the walls completely carried out the illusion.

This tapestry represented Hercules spinning at the feet of Omphale. The drawing was strained in the



OMPHALE

manner of Van Loo, and was of the most Pompadour style imaginable. Hercules' distaff was adorned with a rose-coloured favour; he crooked his little finger with peculiar grace, like a marquis taking a pinch of snuff, as he spun, between his thumb and his forefinger, a few threads of flax. His muscular neck was laden with knots of ribbon, rosettes, rows of pearls, and innumerable feminine ornaments, while a wide pigeon's-breast skirt, with two immense hoops, imparted the final touch to the fashionable appearance of the hero, the slayer of monsters.

Omphale's fair shoulders were half covered by the skin of the Nemean lion; her dainty hand rested on her lover's knotty club; her lovely pale-golden hair, powdered in the same tone, fell nonchalantly adown her neck, supple and undulating like a dove's; her little feet, worthy of any Spanish or Chinese woman, and plainly too small for Cinderella's slipper, were shod with semi-antique cothurns, of a tender lilac shade, embroidered with pearls. She was really charming. She threw back her head in the sauciest possible way; her mouth was pursed up into a delightful pout; her cheeks were slightly flushed; a heart-breaker patch, skilfully placed, brought out the brilliancy of her com-



A R O C O C O S T O R Y

plexion marvellously well. All she needed, to be transformed into an accomplished musketeer, was a little mustache.

There were a good many other figures in the tapestry,—the inevitable companion, and the regulation Cupid,—but they did not leave in my memory an impression sufficiently distinct to enable me to describe them.

I was very young at that time, by which I do not mean to imply that I am very old now; simply that I had just left school, and that I was staying with my uncle until I should decide on the profession I would embrace. If the old gentleman could have foreseen that it would be that of a writer of fantastic stories, I am quite sure he would have turned me out and disinherited me irrevocably, for he professed the most aristocratic contempt for literature in general and authors in particular. Like the true gentleman he was, he would have liked to have every one of the scribblers who make it a business to spoil paper and to speak irreverently of people of quality, thrashed or hanged by his servants.

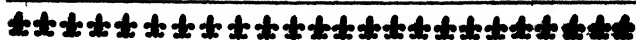
Well, then, I had just left school; I was filled with illusions and dreams; I was just as innocent, and per-



OMPHALE

haps even more innocent, than a Salency maiden. Delighted at having no more impositions to write, I considered that everything was for the best in the best possible of worlds. I believed in no end of things; I believed in M. de Florian's shepherdesses; in curled and powdered sheep; I had not a doubt concerning Mme. Deshoulières' flock. I really believed that there were nine Muses, for old Jouvençy's "Appendix de Diis et Heroïbus" said so. What I remembered of Berquin and Gessner enabled me to create for myself a little world in which everything was rose-coloured, sky-blue, or apple-green. Oh, blessed innocence! *sancta simplicitas!* as Mephistopheles says.

When I found that I was alone in that fine room, in my own room, not somebody else's room as well, I felt inexpressibly happy. I took the most careful inventory of every part of the furniture; I looked into every corner, and explored the place thoroughly. I was in the seventh heaven, happy as a king, as two kings, for the matter of that. After supper, — for we had supper at my uncle's, a delightful custom that has gone out, as well as so many others equally charming which I regret, — I took my candle and withdrew, for I was eager to enjoy my new dwelling.



A ROCOCO STORY

As I was undressing it seemed to me that Omphale's eyes moved. I looked more attentively, feeling a slight tremor, for the room was large and the faint light of the candle served merely to render the darkness more palpable. I thought I noticed that she had turned her head the other way. I began to get really frightened, blew out the light, turned towards the wall, pulled the sheet over my head, drew my night-cap down to my chin, and managed at last to go to sleep.

For several days I did not venture to look at the dreaded tapestry.

I ought perhaps to explain to my fair readers, so that the improbable story I am going to relate may appear less improbable, that at this time I was really quite a good-looking youngster. I had the finest eyes in the world, at least so I have been told; a better complexion than I have now, a regular carnation complexion; brown, curly hair, of which I can still boast, and I was seventeen years of age, which I am not now. All I needed to make a very fair Cherubino was a pretty godmother. Unfortunately my own was fifty-seven years old, and had only three teeth left; too many in the one case, and too few in the other.

One evening, however, I did screw up my courage



OMPHALE

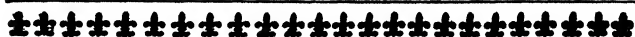
to the point of casting a glance at Hercules' fair mistress. She was gazing at me with the saddest and most languorous look possible. This time I pulled my night-cap down to my shoulders and shoved my head under the bolster.

That night I had a strange dream—supposing it was a dream. I heard the curtain rings on my bedstead rustling on the bar, as if the curtains had been hurriedly drawn. I woke; at least in my dream I seemed to wake. But I saw no one.

The moon's wan, bluish beams entered the room and fell upon the tiling; great shadows, oddly shaped, showed on the floor and the walls. The clock struck a quarter past; the vibration did not die out for a long time; it sounded like a sigh. The ticking of the pendulum, which could be distinctly heard, was exactly like the beating of the heart of some one much moved.

I was anything but at my ease, and did not know what to make of it all.

A fierce gust of wind slammed the shutters and bent in the sash; the wood-work of the panelling creaked, and the tapestry waved. I ventured to look towards Omphale, having a vague suspicion that she had



A ROCOCO STORY

something to do with this business. Nor was I mistaken.

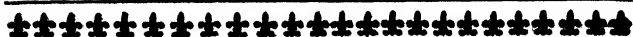
The tapestry was violently agitated. Omphale left the wall, sprang lightly to the floor, and came towards my bed, taking care to keep her face towards me. I fancy I need not enlarge on my amazement, the bravest veteran would have felt a bit queer under such conditions, and I was neither old nor a soldier. Silently I awaited the outcome of the affair.

A little fluted, pearly voice sounded softly in my ear, with the dainty lisp that great ladies and people of the high air affected under the Regency :—

“Do I frighten you, dear? You are but a child, it is true, but it is not nice of you to be afraid of ladies, especially when they are young and inclined to be kind to you. It is not polite and not French, either; so you must get over your fears. Come, you little wild boy, do not look so terrified, and do not hide your head under the blankets. You will need a lot of teaching, for you are evidently very innocent, my handsome page. In my day, Cherubinos were a good deal more enterprising than you.”

“Well, you see —”

“I see that it seems strange to you to behold me



OMPHALE

here, and not there," said she, pressing lightly her white teeth upon her ruby lip and pointing to the wall with her long, slender finger. "You are right; there is something uncanny about it, but you would not understand, even if I did explain the matter to you. Let it suffice that you run no danger."

"I am afraid you may be the — the —"

"Out with it! You are afraid I may be the devil; is not that what you wanted to say? At least you must allow that I am pretty fair for a devil, and that if hell is filled with devils like me, it must be as pleasant to be there as in Paradise."

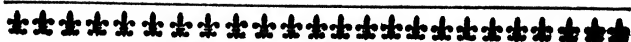
And to prove that she was not indulging in vain boasting, Omphale threw off her lion-skin and exhibited her shoulders and bosom, which were exquisitely modelled and dazzlingly white.

"Well, what do you think of that?" said she, with a little air of satisfied coquetry.

"I think that I should not be a bit afraid if you were the devil himself, Lady Omphale."

"That's right; but you must not call me Lady, nor Omphale. I do not want to be Lady to you, and I am no more Omphale than I am the devil."

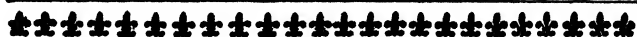
"Then who are you?"



A ROCOCO STORY

“I am the Marchioness de T——. Some time after our marriage, my husband had this tapestry made for my apartment, and had me represented in it under the guise of Omphale, and himself as Hercules. That was a funny notion of his, for Heaven knows he was as little like Hercules as could be. This room has not been inhabited for a long time, and as I have always been fond of society, I was bored to death and had the megrims every day. For to have no company but that of one’s husband is the same thing as having none. But you came, and the room at once brightened up; there was some one in whom I could interest myself. I watched you going and coming; listened to you sleeping and dreaming; I followed your reading. I thought you looked well, that you were attractive,—in short, I loved you. I tried to make you see that; I sighed, but you thought it was the wind; I made signs to you and cast the most languishing glances at you, but only managed to terrify you. At last I determined to take this very improper step and to tell you plainly what you did not guess. Now that you know that I am in love with you, I hope —”

We had got so far in our conversation when the



OMPHALE

sound of a key was heard turning in the lock of the door.

Omphale started and blushed up to the eyes.

“Good-bye till to-morrow,” she said.

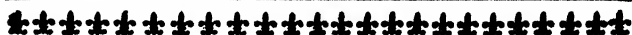
And she walked backwards to her wall, no doubt because she did not want me to see the other side of her.

It was Baptiste, come to take my clothes to brush them.

“You are wrong, sir, to sleep with your bed-curtains drawn back. The room is chilly and you might catch cold in the head.”

It was true that the curtains had been pulled back, which astonished me very much, for I knew they had been drawn close the night before, and I had fancied I had dreamed all that had happened.

As soon as Baptiste had gone I ran to the tapestry. I felt it all over; there was no mistake about it, it was a genuine woollen tapestry, rough to the touch like every piece of arras. Omphale was about as like the lovely phantom of the night as a corpse is like a living being. I pulled the tapestry away from the wall, but the wall was sound; there was neither a secret door nor a secret panel. I did notice, however, that a



A ROCOCO STORY

number of threads were broken on the piece of ground on which rested Omphale's feet. This gave me food for thought.

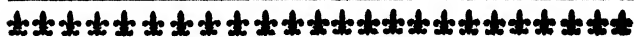
The whole day I was singularly absent-minded. I waited for the night with mingled impatience and anxiety, and withdrew to my room very early, determined to see the business out. I went to bed, and the Marchioness did not keep me waiting. She sprang from the tapestry and came straight to my bed, seating herself near me. Then we fell into conversation.

I put questions to her, just as I had done the previous night; she eluded some, and answered the others in an evasive way, but so wittily that in the course of an hour all my scruples had vanished.

While she spoke she fondled my hair, caressed my face, and kissed me on the forehead.

She chattered away in dainty mocking fashion, in a style at once elegant and familiar, and exceedingly high-bred, which I have never met with since in any one else.

She was seated in the arm-chair by my bedside. Presently she put her arm round my neck, and I could feel her heart beating fast close to mine. She was indeed a real, beautiful, and engaging woman; it was a



OMPHALE

living marchioness who was beside me. And I was a mere school-boy seventeen years old ! It was enough to turn any one's head, and mine was turned completely. I did not quite understand what was going to happen, but I felt in a vague sort of way that the Marquis would not approve of it.

“ But what will the Marquis, up on the wall, think ? ”

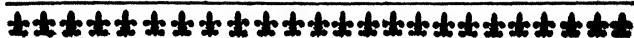
The lion skin had slipped to the floor and the pale-lilac silvery cothurns were lying beside my slippers.

“ He will not say anything,” replied the Marchioness, laughing heartily. “ He never does see anything, and if he did, he is the most philosophical and inoffensive of husbands. He is quite used to this sort of thing. Do you love me, my dear ? ”

“ Indeed, indeed I do.”

At daybreak my mistress took her leave.

The day seemed to me terribly long, but night came at last. The same things happened over again, and the second night was in no respect inferior to the first. The Marchioness was more and more attractive, and our intercourse went on for quite a time. But as I did not sleep at night, I was all day rather somnolent, and my uncle's suspicions were awakened. Probably he listened at the door and heard the conversation between



A ROCOCO STORY

the Marchioness and myself; at all events he entered my room so unexpectedly one morning that Antoinette had barely time to get back to her place.

He was followed by a workman carrying pincers and a ladder, and his stern, grim look made it plain to me that he knew everything.

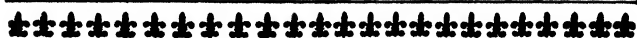
“That Marchioness de T——, is positively crazy. What the devil put it into her head to fall in love with a youngster like that?” muttered he. “And she had so faithfully promised to behave herself!—John, take down that tapestry, roll it up, and carry it to the garret.”

Every word my uncle spoke stabbed me to the heart.

John rolled up my mistress, Omphale, or the Marchioness de T——, and Hercules, or the Marquis de T——, and bundled them both up into the garret. I could not keep back my tears.

The next day my uncle sent me back by the B—— coach to my worthy parents, to whom, as will readily be imagined, I did not tell one word of my adventure.

My uncle died; his house and furniture were sold, and the tapestry probably went with the other things.



OMPHALE

Nevertheless, some time ago, while turning over the goods in a bric à brac shop, in search of curiosities, I stumbled against a great dusty roll covered with cobwebs.

“What’s that?” said I to the dealer.

“A rococo tapestry, representing the loves of Hercules and Omphale; it is Beauvais tapestry, in silk and excellently preserved. Why do you not buy it for your study? I’ll let you have it cheap, seeing it is you.”

At the name of Omphale the blood rushed to my heart.

“Unroll the tapestry,” said I to the dealer, in a quick, sharp, feverish way.

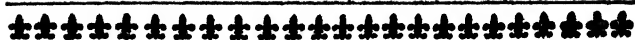
It was she! There was no mistake about it. And it seemed to me that she smiled graciously at me, and that her eyes lighted up as they met mine.

“How much do you want for it?”

“I shall have to ask you four hundred francs net; that is the best I can do.”

“I have not as much about me; I shall go and fetch the money, and be back within an hour.”

When I came back with the money, the tapestry was gone. An Englishman had come in, had offered six hundred francs for it, and had carried it off.



A ROCOCO STORY

Perhaps it is as well that things turned out so, and that I was thus enabled to preserve her sweet remembrance untouched. They say that one should not go back over one's first love, or go to see again the rose admired the day before.

Then I am no longer young enough or good-looking enough for figures to come down out of the tapestry in my honour.

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